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THE MOTHERLY AND AUSPICIOUS
WHITE OF MERGEN

Lord of the Three Worlds

by

MAURICE COLLIS

with designs for the stage

by

FELIKS TOPOLSKI



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To
Yvonne Marling



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The folding plates which are stage designs by Feliks Topolski are to face pages 11, 32, 73 and 91.

*Principal characters
in order of appearance*

- 1 *Headman of the village of Falling Flowers*
- 2 *Abbot of the same village*
3. *Little Gold Fish, later, Lady Saw, later, Queen Saw*
- 4 *Her Father*
- 5 *Yazathingyan, the Chief Minister*
- 6 *Narathihapate, King of Burma*
- 7 *Sawlon, Chief Queen*
- 8 *The Maung Daw, half-brother of the King*
- 9 *Ophla, Captain of the Outer Guard, son of Yazathingyan*
- 10 *The Royal Chaplain*
11. *Theinmazi, a magician*
- 12 *Yang, ex Grand Secretary of the Court of China*

With ladies in waiting, villagers, servants, Amazons, messengers, etc



1. part of the ...
... ...
... ...



Act I Scene I

The village of Falling Flowers in Burma one spring afternoon towards the end of the thirteenth century The village is situated among foothills near the base of Mount Popa, an extinct volcano which rises from a plain, whereon lies the capital, the city of Pagan The part of the village that can be seen is just inside the gateway of the stockade It is an irregular street of wooden houses standing on posts a few feet above the ground and surrounded by palms, bauana trees and flowers Above the stockade towers the cone of Mount Popa in the clear blue sky The impression is more that of a garden in which pavilions are placed at haphazard than of a street in any western village In the left foreground is a tamarind tree, round whose broad trunk is fitted a bamboo platform Opposite, towards the right, is a house with its back to the stockade, wooden steps leading up to its verandah To the right of it is growing a jasmin bush Kneeling round the bush are some village girls, dressed with extreme simplicity in coloured gowns that leave their shoulders and arms bare Their feet are also bare and in their black hair, streaming down their backs, are red orchids They have lacquer trays of fruit and rice, and these they are laying before the jasmin bush, as if making an offering to a celestial spirit Some elderly men, among them the Village Headman, are seated on the platform under the tamarind tree, and women and children are on the verandah of the house All are looking at the ceremony by the bush There is silence for a moment, broken only by the

faint tinkle of pagoda bells in the breeze and the sweet notes of a flute in one of the further houses.



HEADMAN (to the elders about him) Have you considered the meaning, gentlemen? (*His eyes travel again towards the bush*)

AN ELDER. We have considered it, sir

HEADMAN And found the interpretation of the three colours?

SECOND ELDER In the old time of King Alaungsithu it is said

that a jasmine bush,
such as the one
yonder, bloomed in
three colours before
the palace

HEADMAN Blue, red
and white, like our
bush

FIRST ELDER The
very same



HEADMAN And what was it held to signify, so miraculous a flowering?

SECOND ELDER That an angel from the paradise of Tavatimsa had descended upon the bush and that his presence there was very sweet for the kingdom

HEADMAN Are there other cases in your memory?

FIRST ELDER No, sir, such a sign has not been heard of else

HEADMAN (*after a pause*). The bush you speak of was a royal bush, and portended surely the victories of that hero King

But for villagers, such as we, poor cultivators of the earth, what does a celestial presence amongst us?

SECOND ELDER Maybe, to oversee our crops, that we have an abundant harvest



HEADMAN But what have we done to be worthy of such heavenly patronage? No, I cannot believe it. Rather, it concerns the King, and has flowered in our village because this dawn, when the blooms first opened, His Majesty passed by on his ascent of Mount Popa. It is a sign that his colloquy with the tutelary spirits of the mountain will be propitious. They will prophesy for him triumphs, and the whole land, not this village only, will benefit.

FIRST ELDER Nevertheless, as we are the chosen hosts of this visiting presence, we may hope for special reward

HEADMAN That may be so, and we have done well to send the girls with offerings so that the angel stay and grow fond of us

(*During the concluding part of this conversation the Abbot of the village monastery has been seen slowly approaching from the gate of the stockade. He is shaven-headed, a burly man clad in a yellow robe draped on him some-*



what in the manner of a toga. A pace behind him is a boy novice, similarly attired, and holding over the Abbot a yellow parasol. As soon as the Headman and Elders see him, they descend from the platform under the tree and



kneel on the ground. He passes through their ranks and steps onto the platform, where he seats himself. The Elders sit on the ground below him.)

ABBOT (raising his right hand in a ritual gesture).

To the supporters here present of the Religion, peace!

HEADMAN (bowing). Your Reverence's coming is most opportune. Your disciples have been pondering what signifies yonder bush, whose strange flowering, we have heard, your Reverence has already inspected. We await now your Reverence's enlightenment.

ABBOT. In the books it is said that a sign concerns him whose property is its vehicle.

HEADMAN (after looking at the Elders who remain silent and perplexed). Will your Reverence condescend to be a little more simple?

ABBOT. The bush is the vehicle of the sign, for the sign is the various blossoms upon it. And he who planted the bush is the person whom the sign concerns.

(The Elders look at one of their number, a man with a lean form, large eyes and who seems sunk in reverie. As he does not speak, the Headman answers for him.)

HEADMAN. This village councillor has a daughter, and it was she who planted the bush.

ABBOT. What is her name?

FATHER (rousing himself). My daughter's name is Little Gold Fish, sir.

ABBOT. Why did she plant the bush?

FATHER. To have flowers for her hair. And she gave it water,



father

until it flowered this morning. When she saw the three colours she ran to me astonished, though not more astonished than I am every season to see the stalk and ear come from my grain of rice.

ABBOT (*condescendingly*). Stalk and ear are natural unfoldings, but this bush has been touched by some other influence.

FATHER. To me a heavenly influence seems everywhere. I feel it thrilling in the earth as I follow my plough in the rain, and in the wind, the sunlight, the dew.

ABBOT (*not interested in such fantasies*). Let your daughter be called, that she may hear while I expound what the bush portends for her. (*The father of Little Gold Fish rises to his feet and goes toward the house opposite.*)

FATHER (*calling*). Little Gold Fish!

A VOICE. Yes father.

(*There steps from the veranda a girl of seventeen, dressed like the girls at the bush in a simple red gown tucked in above her breast, and falling to her bare feet. Her complexion and the skin of her arms and shoulders are a*

golden brown. She is handsome in a regular manner, and her expression is happy, animated and downright. She stands there and is joined by her mother. Her father motions them to come before the Abbot. They approach and kneel.)

ABBOT. Little Gold Fish, your father says you planted the jasmine bush over there.

LITTLE GOLD FISH (*anxiously*). Yes your Reverence, I plant all the flowers for the house.

ABBOT. The white, blue and red blossoms are a most lucky sign. Great good fortune is coming to you.

LITTLE GOLD FISH. Great good fortune, your Reverence! But how to be more happy than to live here with those I love? (*Nevertheless, she is excited.*)



MOTHER Hush, dear, and let his Reverence speak (*to the Abbot*) Will your Reverence please say with what kind of good fortune my daughter will meet?

(*At this moment a distraction occurs, for the Headman's clerk hurries in from the gate*)



CLERK (*loudly*) The royal procession is coming down the mountain

HEADMAN (*surprised*) How can that be? The King in general spends the night on the mountain when he consults the oracle

CLERK I cannot say, sir But the watchers on the palm tops have reported the procession to be in sight.

HEADMAN (*to Elders*) We must go to the gate and attend by the roadside as we did this morning, there to salute the King as he passes (*The Elders get up The Headman turns to the Abbot*) Will your Reverence come with us?

ABBOT It will be more proper for me to return to my monastery. (*He descends from the platform*)

MOTHER (*moving forward and kneeling at the Abbot's feet*) Before your Reverence goes, please say when my daughter's good fortune begins

ABBOT Why, from this time onwards

MOTHER (*in a beseeching tone as he turns to go*). What will it be? Tell me but that.

ABBOT. Such a sign is said to betoken sudden elevation. But

when the King is gone past, we can speak more of it (*He leaves with his novice*)

MOTHER (*exclaiming*) She will marry a merchant from the city!
(*A pursuivant in royal livery enters the village*)



PURSUIVANT. Heh! Who is the Headman here?

HEADMAN (*startled*) I am the Headman.

PURSUIVANT. Then prepare to receive His Majesty The Chief Minister has sent me on to announce that His Majesty will enter here to rest.

HEADMAN (*much flustered*). His Majesty will enter my village!

PURSUIVANT Yes, he and his train

HEADMAN. His train, too! The Chief Minister!

PURSUIVANT Aye, and the Chief Queen and the Royal Brother

HEADMAN (*in a despairing voice*). How can we poor people of a hill village entertain a King's Court?

PURSUIVANT (*with contempt*) That is your affair (*He turns abruptly and departs*)

HEADMAN (*urgently addressing the Elders standing about him with agitated faces, except Little Gold Fish's father, who has taken out his flute and is smiling at it*) Quick! We must do what we can All of you hurry! Get out your mats That is the first thing—get mats and spread them Then a few bamboos and hangings and we have a pavilion.

FIRST ELDER. Sir, there is not time to build a pavilion, even of the simplest

(*The Headman looks at the platform under the tree and an idea strikes him*)

HEADMAN I will fetch the carpet in my house. That spread on the platform, it can serve as a throne, the leaves above it for canopy

SECOND ELDER And I have a pillow that will do for a royal cushion

HEADMAN (*to other Elders*) And you, get cocoanuts to offer, and what fruit is to hand, and flowers. Hasten now! Bring whatever you have that may please him, that is curious or has beauty, for Kings delight in novelties (*As the Elders disperse he calls after them*) And have the gong sounded to assemble the villagers. And warn them to put on their best clothes

(*He goes to get his carpet Little Gold Fish's mother has hurried back to her house to dress, having beckoned to her daughter to follow. But Little Gold Fish remains with her father, who is gently playing his flute. They walk over to the bush, which is now deserted.*)

LITTLE GOLD FISH How lovely the flowers are! He said it meant elevation My heart gave a bound when he said that, though I was frightened too Suppose I had to leave you? Leave the village?

FATHER He said nothing of leaving

LITTLE GOLD FISH How else an elevation?

FATHER (*gently*) I do not know But if you go, perhaps you will return The world is not all that it seems in youth when new sights and sounds are most marvellous Before I was twenty I had seen the King's seat at Pagan city, its towering pagodas and the spires of the palace And once I journeyed south down the great Irrawaddy to the sea It was there I met your mother and might have stayed in the lower country with profit, but I came back and have felt closer to divinity here, planting my fields and reaping them, than even in Pagan with

its thousand shrines. But, maybe, you will find your full happiness away

(*The Elders begin to bring the mats and make ready the place for the King, but the father and daughter do not break off their talk*)

LITTLE GOLD FISH. I do not want to go

FATHER (*smiling*) Your bounding heart betrayed you!

LITTLE GOLD FISH. Do you think that go I shall? That Abbot divines only by rule of thumb. You see directly into things

FATHER (*dwelling upon the flowers*) I cannot say These flowers, they tell me nothing.

LITTLE GOLD FISH. But you have had other intimations, I know, for you have hinted as much in our talks.

FATHER. Wandering on the skirts of the mountain, I have heard whispers Some kind of darkness threatens the kingdom But what has that to do with you, who are to be fortunate?

A VOICE (*loudly from the gate*) The Chief Minister has come, has come!



(*The Headman, who is now on the platform under the tree arranging the carpet, hastily gets down, and, collecting the Elders about him, advances and as a sedan chair is carried in, kneels The bearers put down the chair, and the Chief Minister, Yazathingyan, steps out, a tall gaunt elderly man with a pointed hat and embroidered robe His mien is authoritative, his face clever*)

YAZATHINGYAN (*pointing to a carpet and cushions in his sedan*)
Take those and arrange them. (*The Headman takes them*) That
will do. Now listen again. When His Majesty is helped from
his sedan to his seat, do not come bothering him. Put a couple
of girls to fan him, but do not you crawl near with offerings
or petitions or the like. Keep away! let him rest. We have had
a very dreadful experience on the mountain. From start to
finish everything went wrong. All the signs were as sinister as
could be. Then at the end the tigers!

HEADMAN The tigers, your Excellency! What tigers?

YAZATHINGYAN. I have forbidden you to ask questions, Head-
man. His Majesty is grievously upset. Do you think we
should have halted at a village of this sort unless his state
imperatively demanded? When he has got his breath, then all
speed to Pagan (*muttering*) What an answer for the mountain
oracle to give! To decide which course to steer will not be easy.

HEADMAN (*though greatly at a loss, instinctively able to say the right
thing*). Your Excellency will know which course well enough.

YAZATHINGYAN (*pleased*). I daresay

A VOICE (*loudly from the gate*) His Majesty has come, has come

YAZATHINGYAN Now mind what I have told you. Keep
silence and keep back, unless asked questions, when answer
briskly. I shall kneel here to receive the Royal Sedan. Where
is that dirty piece of carpet?

HEADMAN (*showing it*) Here, your Excellency

YAZATHINGYAN Put it down there for me. Better than having
to kneel in the dust. (*He is hardly down on his carpet before the*



Royal Sedan is through the gate. It is followed by two other sedans, one containing the Chief Queen and the other the Royal Brother. The bearers of the Royal Sedan at a sign from Yazathingyan halt in front of him. The other two sedans also come to a stop, one behind the other.



Since the arrival of Yazathingyan, Little Gold Fish and her father have remained at the bush, forgetful of the Headman's instructions to dress. The rest of the population, clothed in their best, has gathered in a wide semi-circle and is watching respectfully, the Elders near the Headman, and the others further back. Yazathingyan speaks to the sedan bearers :—
Draw the curtain.

(The bearers draw the curtains, disclosing the King, Narathihapate, in a state of collapse, his crown awry, his ritual robes in disorder. He is a young man of medium height. Yazathingyan supports him slowly to the



seat under the tamarind. He is propped with cushions and lolls back against the trunk, his eyes half shut. Two girls, under the direction of the Headman, fan him carefully. Meanwhile, the Chief Queen, Sawlon, and the King's half-brother, known as the Maung Daw, have alighted from their

sedans. Queen Sawlon, a slight woman of about thirty, very exquisitely dressed in the robes suited to a visit to the state oracle, views the scene with a disdainful smile, which disguises the state of nerves she is in. The Maung Daw, a shifty-looking little man of about the King's age, enters immediately into conversation with his Councillor, an elderly person, with puffy eyes, who has descended with him from the sedan)

SAWLON (*calling haughtily*) Chief Minister! Where am I to sit? Have you made no arrangements?

YAZATHINGYAN (*hastening to her*) Will your Majesty condescend to sit on this carpet for a moment until His Majesty is sufficiently restored to proceed?

(*He causes the Headman to spread out his carpet on the platform to the King's right*)

SAWLON (*viewing the crowd with distaste*) I shall remain in my sedan. How stupidly the people stare!

(*She re-enters her sedan.*)

COUNCILLOR (*in Maung Daw's ear*) I advise that we go on. It may be useful to arrive back first at Court.



MAUNG DAW (*to Yazathingyan*) I will not stay. You can follow with the King as soon as he is recovered.

YAZATHINGYAN It will be more proper for your Grace to wait. If we do not return to Pagan in due procession as we left it, rumour will fly about that all is not well.

MAUNG DAW That rumour must already be flying through the country. What happened on Mount Popa this day cannot be concealed. The whole people will certainly know that the King's life is threatened.

(He re-enters his sedan and directs his bearers to carry him out. Yazathingyan, with an uneasy look, watches him go. He then approaches the platform. King Narathihapate opens his eyes.)



NARATHIHAPATE (*in a faint voice*) Where are we?

YAZATHINGYAN (*over his shoulder to the Headman*) Where are we?

HEADMAN (*unhappily*) I do not understand, your Honour

YAZATHINGYAN What is the name of this village, you fool?

HEADMAN (*relieved*) Falling Flowers, your Excellency

YAZATHINGYAN (*to the King*) Falling Flowers, Your Majesty

During the descent of the mountain, Your Majesty becoming suddenly indisposed, it seemed prudent to make a halt, and I directed the royal bearers here

NARATHIHAPATE You were right. I was very low. I may even have lost consciousness for a while. But, indeed, who can say that I had not good cause?

YAZATHINGYAN (*in a reassuring tone*) Your Majesty, no doubt, had reasons to be dissatisfied. But there is no need to magnify what occurred.

NARATHIHAPATE (*wildly*) Have I magnified it? How can it be magnified? Tigers issue from the wood and carry away the female votaries when, possessed by the guardian spirits, they are about to prophesy in my presence. What could be a more startling sign of catastrophe?

YAZATHINGYAN If ill fortune were signified, it can be met by device. Forewarned, we will be doubly prudent and cautious. Moreover, the whole may have the natural explanation that the tigers were hungry and killed for that reason.

NARATHIHAPATE (*crying out*). It is no natural event when on the sacred mount and before the state oracle tigers rush in and put an end to the rite.

(*Overcome by the terrible recollection, the King sinks on his cushions and closes his eyes. The Headman and villagers who have been listening to the colloquy with stupefaction utter a moaning cry of horror.*)

YAZATHINGYAN (*much irritated, to the Headman*) I bring His Majesty here to rest and recover, and all you can do is howl like dogs. Have you nothing pleasant to distract his thoughts? (*He rises from before the platform and goes to Sawlon's sedan.*) Your Majesty, come, I pray, to the King. Sit near and comfort him, as is proper for you to do.



SAWLON (*leaning from the sedan with her supercilious stare*) It was your doing that the King has been discomforted. Comfort him yourself, as best you may. You brought us upon the mountain and to this village. Now bring us back to our palace of Pagan.

YAZATHINGYAN (*in a soothing voice*) Like us all, the Chief Queen is upset. But the pleasant air of this village will calm and restore her.

SAWLON (*a little hysterical*) I do not like this village. It is too close to the mountain. Hey, bearers! I will not wait! Carry me after the Royal Brother. (*She is borne out.*)



HEADMAN (to Yazathingyan) I have a contortionist here, Lord
Maybe she could divert His Majesty

YAZATHINGYAN Nor contortion nor distortion is what he
wants, but what is happy, wholesome and fortunate

(Suddenly voices in the crowd call out)

VOICES The bush! The bush! Show His Majesty the flowers

(The villagers all turn to look at Little Gold Fish, who is kneeling by
the bush At once, and as if acting on an impulse, she rises, breaks a
branch on which are flowers in three colours, and laying it on her head,
advances slowly towards the King, clad in her simple gown, barefooted,



without powder, her expression warm, open and buoyant Music
accompanies her, for many of the men take their flutes and instinctively
create an impromptu harmony And a breeze in the top of a tall tree



covered with white blossoms sends them floating down, so that she
approaches in a shower of perfumed whiteness)

NARATHIHAPATE (opening his eyes and gazing in a half stupor at
Little Gold Fish) Who approaches like an angel in a mist of

petals to the sound of flutes with flower-branch on her head ?
YAZATHINGYAN (*quick to fan the King's interest*) I will enquire,
Your Majesty But it is evident she enjoys celestial favour, or
on her coming the heavens would not rain flowers (*Over his
shoulder to the Headman*) Who is the girl ?

HEADMAN (*whispering*) As your Honour divines, she has been
touched by the sky

YAZATHINGYAN (*in Headman's ear*) Cleverly arranged, Head-
man! You shall have your reward

HEADMAN Your Honour, she is in truth a recipient of divine
favour, as will prove the strange flowers she carries on her head

NARATHIHAPATE Answer me Who is she ?

YAZATHINGYAN (*quickly*) It seems, Your Majesty, that while
for us on the mountain the signs were adverse, more auspicious
happenings have taken place in this village The girl can
tell us of them, for they particularly concern her, if Your
Majesty will give her permission to speak

NARATHIHAPATE (*to Little Gold Fish*) Speak! Speak!
(*She is already kneeling before his seat*)

LITTLE GOLD FISH I have brought these jasmins as a present
to Your Majesty, for they are flowers of good fortune. (*She
takes the branch from her head and gives it to the King*)

NARATHIHAPATE (*examining the flowers*) This is very strange
Three colours on the one stalk!

LITTLE GOLD FISH At dawn when I went out to look at my
bush, I found it to be so

HEADMAN (*eagerly*) She ran and told us, Your Majesty, and we
enquired A holy spirit is certainly in the bush

NARATHIHAPATE (*to Little Gold Fish*) And you have given me
the flowers that the spirit brought to you! (*He is deeply pleased*)

YAZATHINGYAN (*in his most judicious manner*) As Your Majesty
knows, I have made some study of signs There is none more
potent for good than unusual flowerings The young person
will doubtless be very lucky And that so spontaneously she

had the thought to offer her auspicious flowers is itself a sign that Your Majesty can participate in her good fortune
NARATHIHAPATE (*delightedly*) Can her gift indeed bestow what I have most need of?

YAZATHINGYAN In your servant's opinion her gift cannot bestow it, but is a sign that she herself can

NARATHIHAPATE (*puzzled but excited*) She can provide what will outweigh the grievous forebodings of this morning?

YAZATHINGYAN Your servant's submission is this: if Your Majesty installs her in the Palace, her good fortune will protect Your Majesty, for it is evident that, were Your Majesty to come to harm, she would fall from the high state to which you had promoted her, but as she cannot fall, the signs being all to the contrary, Your Majesty being allied to her must likewise stand

NARATHIHAPATE (*gratefully*) How wisely you argue, and with what scholarship! A happy chance brought me to this sweet village (*to Little Gold Fish*) You shall come with me to Pagan. And since, with such open heart, you gave me the precious flowers, so I with as generous a hand will provide for you (*to Yazathingyan*) Inform her parents and see they are rewarded (*Little Gold Fish's mother has crept forward till she is close behind her daughter*)

MOTHER. Thank you, thank you, Holy King

YAZATHINGYAN Where is the father?

HEADMAN By the bush yonder, sir

YAZATHINGYAN (*raising his voice*) Come that His Majesty may reward you

FATHER (*with his pensive smile advancing a few steps*) I require no reward (*He slips into the crowd*)

MOTHER (*quickly*) Your Lordship can pay the money to me

YAZATHINGYAN (*laughing*) That is the kind of talk I understand. (*He rewards her*)

NARATHIHAPATE (*getting up, his spirits quite revived*) My sedan!

Evening falls We have far to go. (*to Little Gold Fish*) You shall ride with me. Soon the full moon will be lighting us The plain will be tusk-white and, where the shadows are thrown, a black onyx We shall glide over it, as do the sylvan gods, and come at dawn to the moat and to the high gates and to the golden porticos of Pagan, as in a dream

LITTLE GOLD FISH (*drawing a long breath*) As in a dream
(*She mounts with the King into his sedan, as does Yazathingyan into his*)

HEADMAN (*kneeling by the royal sedan*) Lady, when you are come into your power, do not forget us, poor people

LITTLE GOLD FISH (*tears springing to her eyes*) Never, oh, never!
(*Her father approaches with his shy, loving face*)

FATHER Nor forget that the divine powers have chosen you as protectrix Do not tire or despair, but strive to the end

LITTLE GOLD FISH. Sustain me, father

FATHER (*his head sunk on his breast*) As I can And now, farewell

(*At the King's signal, the bearers lift the sedan and begin to move out*)

MOTHER (*running with a package*) Here are her slippers, her best silk and her scarf. (*She thrusts the package into the sedan.*) Excuse me, Sacred Lord

(*As the royal sedan, followed by Yazathingyan's, is borne away, the villagers, led by the Headman and Elders, form a procession and follow to the gate, blowing their flutes and tapping on hand-drums and gongs*)



End of Act I, Scene I



Act I Scene II

A garden of the Palace of Pagan The Palace of King Narathihapate is an enclosure inside the city of Pagan, like the Palace of the Chinese Emperors, a city within a city It consists of a number of halls, pavilions, apartments, gardens, ponds and sacred edifices In the present scene the foreground is a formal garden with flowering shrubs Further back is a



terrace whose level is two feet above the garden It winds in from the left and crosses the stage Connecting the terrace with the garden are a few steps flanked by two monsters sitting on their haunches Behind the terrace to the right is a pavilion with a tiered roof supported by numerous gilded pillars Through its pillars and behind the terrace to centre and left a vista of the palace-city forms the background One sees roofs piled one on top of the other and ending in finials, gables flared upwards and carved

with leaves in which are elephants and flying spirits, and façades whose doorways have serpentine entablatures

It is sunrise

Enter the Maung Daw and his Councillor, accompanied by two minions, stalwart men stripped to the waist. They are in conversation

MAUNG DAW (with a wave of his arm) He cannot live I say

COUNCILLOR (cautiously) But the girl—

MAUNG DAW What does she matter? It was her luck, not his

COUNCILLOR (doubtfully) If we gamble our luck against hers we shall lose

MAUNG DAW (irritated) He, it is, that we strike. I shall not lay hands upon her (they come to a stop at the foot of the steps and sit on the ground) Against him alone it is certain. He cannot survive after what happened on the mountain

COUNCILLOR If his end is so certain, wait awhile and let it come of itself

MAUNG DAW Fatemove slow, but may be hustled when the signs are good. Why should I wait, when I can have all at once with a little trying? (They hear the rustle of silk and looking up see enter upon the terrace Queen Sawlon, dressed with extreme elegance, fashion and richness, her train of followers as richly adorned. She comes at a sauntering pace, her expression proud, indifferent and self-contained. Passing by the head of the steps at the bottom of which sits the Royal Brother, she does not deign to look down or recognise him, but is heard to sigh.)

SAWLON What a pity, what a pity!

(She continues and saunters on out of sight. They stare after her with disquiet.)



COUNCILLOR (*anxiously*) You heard that? What did she mean?

MAUNG DAW (*contemptuously*). The Chief Queen is half demented. No one can tell what her thoughts are. She passes like a wraith

COUNCILLOR She is unhappy

MAUNG DAW Who would not be unhappy linked with that doomed wretch?

COUNCILLOR She spoke like one lamenting not his doom, but another's

MAUNG DAW (*impatiently*) Who can say? (*he mounts the steps, followed by his three companions and looks about him*) It were at such a spot, if he passed by alone that . . .

COUNCILLOR. When is he alone? A King is alone never You will bungle it An assassination is done in a dark place

MAUNG DAW. It is not darkness, but signs that make a killing certain.

(*The King enters on the terrace with Little Gold Fish. The conspirators retreat themselves behind the pillars on the adjacent gallery. The King advances with his companion. He is undressed as if he had just risen from bed, and wears a loose robe of flower-red silk and a peaked cap. She has on a green damask skirt tight and slit to the thighs - bodice of soft red silk, woven about her body, and leaving bare her arms and shoulders. Her head-dress is like the rays of the rising sun*)

NARATHIHAPATE (*stopping and turning to look at Little Gold Fish as one might look at a protecting talisman*) The shadow is lifting. See how the morning sun has conquered again I too have come out of the darkness The transcendent Beings have had mercy upon me. (*firmly*) They sent you to me

LITTLE GOLD FISH (*smiling with artifice*) My coming hither was indeed very strange.

NARATHIHAPATE (*in a reserved way*) It is right that what pertains to a King should be strange. If Heaven regards him not neither correcting nor comforting him he is like a common

man and can have no assurance that eyes from beyond are watching over him. But it is dreadful when these eyes glare out, as they did upon the mountain. I thought it sentence of death, but now know it to have been but a passing displeasure. When they saw me so cast down they found you for me.

LITTLE GOLD FISH (*in her open heartfelt way*) The King is wholly reassured by my coming? How glad I am. Is it really so?

NARATHIHAPATE If it were not, would I be walking thus alone, though in the Palace? Without a full guard I should not have ventured. What do I know of the hearts about me? In this old seat conspiracy is never still. I cannot read even Sawlon, my Chief Queen. And my Chief Minister, can I trust him to advise me aright?

LITTLE GOLD FISH The Chief Minister has a wide knowledge of plain affairs, I think.

NARATHIHAPATE (*beginning to walk up and down the terrace*) Not thus do I wish to govern. I have high designs, lofty visions. His are earthbound—the revenue, the police! He is a manager and would manage me. But I do not will to go that way (*his eyes becoming twisted up*) There are secrets (*his voice rising*) There are powers that may be attained. There are voices. There is enslavement of ghosts.

LITTLE GOLD FISH (*giving him a startled look*) To meddle with such things is dangerous, surely?

NARATHIHAPATE Dangerous, had I not already sure sign of protection.

LITTLE GOLD FISH (*not understanding*) What sure sign?

NARATHIHAPATE You are my sign. After the apparitions upon the mountain, you were revealed in floating petals, divine flowers in your hand. Propped on that proof of favour, I may aspire where I will. Nothing can touch me.

(*Before Little Gold Fish can ask for more explanation, there enters the*

Chief Minister, Yazathingyan, followed by his son Ophla, a young man of resolute mien and great physique. He has a hard face They pass across to the foot of the steps leading up to the terrace)



YAZATHINGYAN (*kneeling*). Your Majesty

NARATHIHAPATE (*catching sight of the Chief Minister*). What is it?

YAZATHINGYAN (*affably*) I was on my way to the Council Chamber, and am fortunate to meet with Your Majesty here. There is a matter on which Your Majesty desired early report Have I the Royal Ear?

NARATHIHAPATE (*distastefully*) I was talking of private matters with the Lady of Falling Flowers

YAZATHINGYAN As Your Majesty pleases, but since the matter concerns the said Lady, it may not be improper to introduce it now

NARATHIHAPATE (*in a changed tone*). You should have said so at once Certainly let me hear of it, if it concerns her

YAZATHINGYAN Your Majesty commended me to find her a suitable name I have instituted a careful search among the records and submit that the style Saw, borne in the past by several ladies of distinction, would be fitting

NARATHIHAPATE You have consulted the astrologers?

YAZATHINGYAN I have And they agree that her natal measurements are in harmony with it

NARATHIHAPATE (*pleased*) I like the name, for I recollect it was my maternal grandmother's and she on one occasion saved my grandfather's life

YAZATHINGYAN A coincidence that escaped me, but makes the style all the more in point, though I trust that the good fortune your new lady brings with her will never have to extend to so grave a contingency

NARATHIHAPATE Nevertheless, should it have so to extend, it will suffice The terrors of the mountain have been wiped from my mind by her coming and I am confident in any event

YAZATHINGYAN I am heartily glad to hear Your Majesty speak so But it is well to take also police precautions This I have already done in part To complete them I have the following submission The command of the Outer Guard should be in well-trying hands (*he glances at his son Ophla who is kneeling at his back*) Your Majesty knows the courage of my son Nor is his intelligence less than his resolution

NARATHIHAPATE You want me to appoint your son Captain of the Outer Guard?

YAZATHINGYAN It were a measure of prudence, I submit.

(*He glances again at his son*)

OPHLA (*with a prostration*) Your Majesty shall have my most absolute devotion

NARATHIHAPATE (*turning to Little Gold Fish, now become Lady Saw, who has been standing quietly behind him*) What do you say, Lady Saw? (*he emphasises the word*) You shall advise me Though you cannot answer from experience, some hidden prompting may tell you

SAW (*with her golden calm*) I would not deceive the King by pretending to what I do not possess In the palace but a week, I have not before seen the Grand Minister's son and cannot tell whether he is qualified If the manner of my coming before the King portended in itself a virtue to benefit him, do not ask me to exceed what was foreshadowed

YAZATHINGYAN (*quickly*) The Lady Saw is right Nevertheless, her not receiving a contrary intimation should be counted, for were my son destined to undo what is her destiny to fulfil, certainly her secret ear would have caught the reverberation

NARATHIHAPATE. So be it then Your son shall have the Captaincy

YAZATHINGYAN Your Majesty is very gracious to us

OPHLA May the time come when I can give my life in Your Majesty's service

(*The two withdraw the way they came in For an instant the Maung Daw is seen peeping from behind a pillar of the pavilion*)

NARATHIHAPATE (*turning to Lady Saw with a smile*) What matter who is Captain of the Outer Guard? But I have to humour the Chief Minister, having been King so short a time. (*he begins walking about again*) There were difficulties to start with Some people were against me (*bitterly*) Said my half brother had the better claim and, even, that he was the better man The Chief Minister supported me for his own reasons, he wanted a King under his thumb And he saddled me with Sawlon, the late King's Queen, knowing I should

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get no support from her. Both have but small opinion of me.

But, as I was saying, I have my plans.

SAW The King is very kind to have told me so much But I do not grasp altogether his meaning

NARATHIHAPATE Never mind You will see. Stand by me. That is all you need do

SAW (anxiously) You will not make me go against right?

NARATHIHAPATE (startled) Is not a great King bound to be right?

(*There approaches on the terrace from the left a tall thin old man with the face of an ascetic His whole crown is shaven, his feet are bare and he wears the saffron robe of the Buddhist Order A novice, similarly attired, attends him and holds a yellow parasol over his head Lady Saw sees him first*)

SAW (in a low voice) The Royal Chaplain is coming.

NARATHIHAPATE (looking round). That is opportune

(*The Royal Chaplain, when a few paces away, stops and raises his open hand in the prescribed ritual gesture*)

ROYAL CHAPLAIN. To the Royal Upholder of the Religion, peace.

NARATHIHAPATE (bowing with his hands in a praying attitude) I am much obliged to your Holiness for condescending to visit me

ROYAL CHAPLAIN (distantly) I was unaware the Royal Upholder was here

NARATHIHAPATE Now that we have met, will your Holiness speak with me?

ROYAL CHAPLAIN. This is the hour when I go to meditate.

NARATHIHAPATE Nevertheless, stay a short while Here is a retired place where we may talk undisturbed I have need of your counsel

(*Saying this, the King makes a sign to Lady Saw to withdraw a little She descends the steps from the terrace and seats herself at the bottom between the monsters*)

ROYAL CHAPLAIN (*less severely*) Upon what do you require my counsel?

NARATHIHAPATE. Upon matters of the highest moment



The Royal Chaplain

ROYAL CHAPLAIN The Eightfold Path of Right Action?

NARATHIHAPATE Matters more withdrawn and secret

ROYAL CHAPLAIN The Path embraces all that needs be known

NARATHIHAPATE Bear with me a moment, your Holiness I seek to be a great King But it is difficult My father's repute was so high To emulate him I must accomplish wonders Wonders are possible if one knows the way Will you not tell me some of your secrets?



ROYAL CHAPLAIN What secrets?

NARATHIHAPATE (*in a low tense voice*) The great secrets The

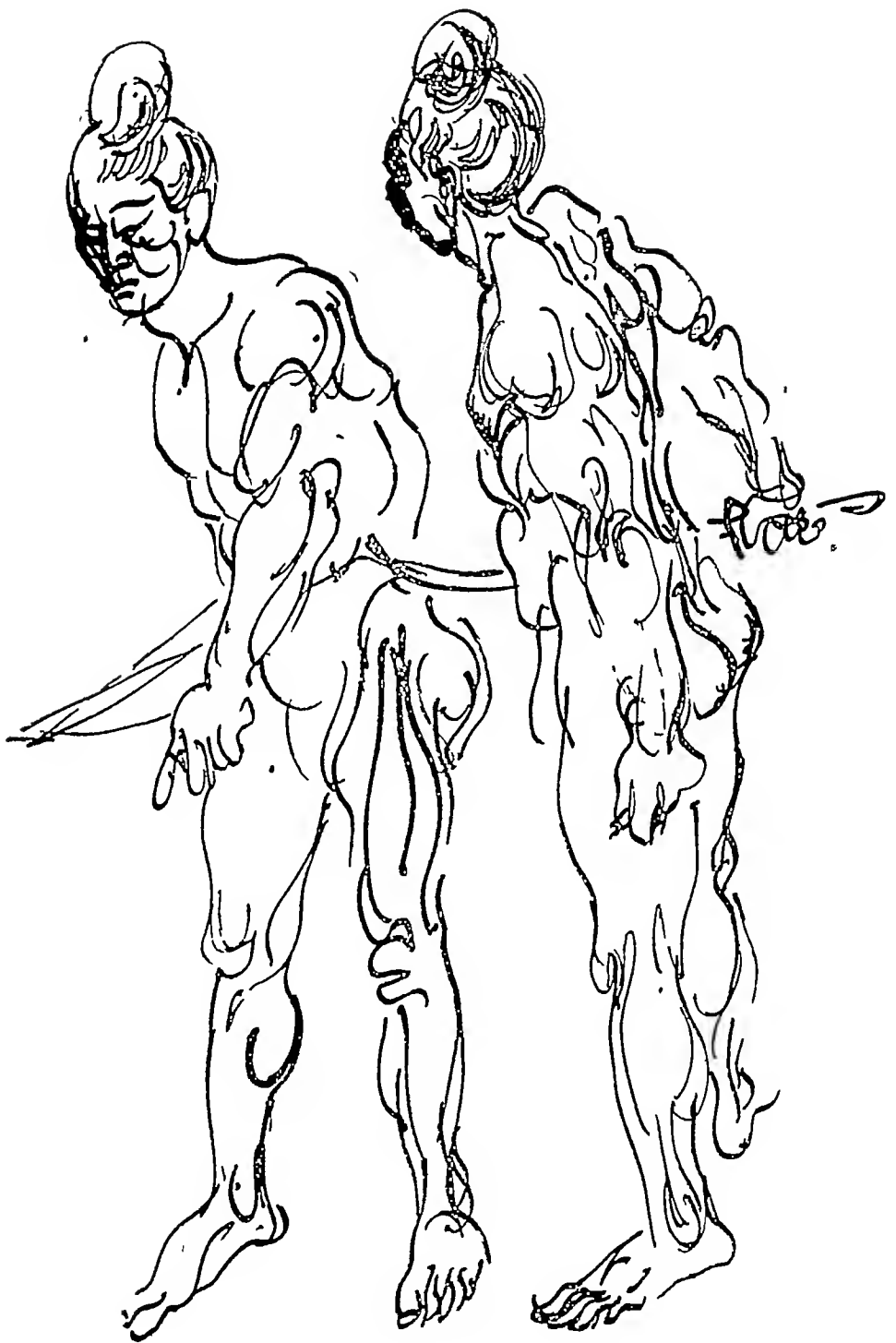
secret of invulnerability, the secret of invincibility, and how to constrain the spirits of the dead.

ROYAL CHAPLAIN (*stiffly*) Such arts are illusory Were I to dabble in them, my perception of truth would be clouded over I have put them from my mind, and beg the King to do likewise

NARATHIHAPATE. Though you do not practise them, they are known to you If you will impart what you know, it will suffice I shall be greater than my father, the equal perhaps of the ancient Kings who could colloque with transcendent Beings Nor need I be afraid to enter upon that quest of universal lordship, for I believe that Heaven has already spread its protection over me

ROYAL CHAPLAIN (*emphatically*) I will tell nothing, nor say what I know or do not know And I beg the King not to seek the information from others. Such studies, such hopes, are deluding fancies They are worse, for they drive mad And with madness will follow the ruin of the kingdom Dwell no more upon them, but rather consider the Ten Duties of a King—beneficence to all, daily meditation, the showing of mercy, the dispensing of justice, the exaction of but a tenth, punishment without anger, relief of the old and sick, employment of prudent officers, the avoidance of pride, the listening to good counsel Put in practice all these Ten Duties, and the whole Court, the whole country, the whole world, will acclaim you

(Uttering these words in the most measured and solemn tone, the Royal Chaplain gives the King a look of compassion, and, signing to his novice to follow, passes out to the right with his head bowed After his departure the King stands alone on the terrace, as if much dashed Suddenly the silence is broken by the call of a barking deer Immediately thereafter, the Maung Daw, his Councillor and two minions emerge from behind the pillars in the pavilion The King has his back to them nor can Lady Saw see them, since she is below the terrace They advance upon the King)



MAUNG DAW (*to minions in a whisper*) Take him into the pavilion before she can see We will choke him there at leisure

(*The minions tip-toe up and lay hold of the King.*)

NARATHIHAPATE. Ah, ah! What is this?

(*He struggles*)

MAUNG DAW. No harm I have a word to say My men will help Your Majesty to the pavilion

COUNCILLOR (*interposing in agitation*) She is coming! I told you it could not be done this way



(*Lady Saw has seen the minions at the moment they seize the King, and, starting up, mounts to the terrace*)

NARATHIHAPATE (*shouting to her*) Get help! Run! Get help!

(*But Lady Saw goes towards him, slowly and as if dazed She is frightened, but she goes on*)

SAW. What are you doing to him?

MAUNG DAW No reason to worry, Lady It is nothing

(*He moves as if to stop her*)

COUNCILLOR (*with a scream*) Do not touch her! Do not touch her!

(*The minions, their nerve shaken, let go of the King and regard Lady*

Saw with fear in their eyes She is trembling. Passing the Maung Daw, she comes to the King and clasps him by the arm)

NARATHIHAPATE (in a high hysterical voice) Safe! Safe!

COUNCILLOR (shading his eyes as if he could not bear sight of Lady Saw) We can do nothing! We are lost!

(With a howl of terror he leaps from the terrace and runs out, followed by the minions The Maung Daw is left face to face with the King and Lady Saw.)

MAUNG DAW (kneeling) I have erred But, indeed, my intentions were blameless I sought only to ask a favour.

NARATHIHAPATE (with a sneer) When a favour is to be asked of a King is it customary to use force against his person?

MAUNG DAW (prostrate) Have mercy! The force used was very slight

NARATHIHAPATE The intention was very evil Had it not been for this Lady you would have murdered me But you dared not stand against an emissary of the sky

MAUNG DAW (to Saw) Have mercy, Lady of the Falling Flowers Out of the largeness of your power be clement You saved the King Save me, even me, also, for what can it



profit such as you, so fenced with celestial favour, to grind a miserable man in the dust ?

SAW (*gently*) Alas ! I have no power I did but stand beside the King
NARATHIHAPATE (*in a triumphant voice*) That was enough !

(*Enter in haste Yazathingyan, Ophla and a guardsman*)



YAZATHINGYAN (*panting*) I am most happy to see Your Majesty unhurt A man came running after us to say you were attacked And with all speed we have returned

NARATHIHAPATE Did you detain the man ?

YAZATHINGYAN No, Your Majesty. I knew him well The Maung Daw's Councillor

NARATHIHAPATE He was guilty of my attempted murder As also his master (*pointing to the Maung Daw*) Arrest him

(*The guardsman seizes the Maung Daw*)

YAZATHINGYAN Which death, if it please Your Majesty ?

NARATHIHAPATE (*with ferocity*) The elephants ! Let him be tossed and torn and trampled



YAZATHINGYAN He shall be
And may I know how Your
Majesty escaped unhurt?

NARATHIHAPATI (*with irony*)
Not through the vigilance
of your police nor yet by
your son's devotion, but
by the mere presence of the
Lady Saw as I was confident
would be the case

YAZATHINGYAN (*thinking
gauchly*) Ah! they thought
she was celestially favoured
NARATHIHAPATI And right-
ly Do you not think the
same?

YAZATHINGYAN (*promptly*)
Most certainly (*with adroit-
ness*) And since it was I who
advised her installation here,
it cannot be said I have been
negligent in Your Majesty's
defence

(A rustle is heard and they look
round to see Queen Sawlon ap-
proaching on the terrace, followed
as before by her train of women
She has changed her clothes and is
garbed in the summit of elegance,
her gown being a tissue of cloth
of gold and her headdress piled up
like a pagoda She treads on with
an insolent gait, on her face an expression disabused and melancholy
There is a hush as she comes, for no one can tell what she will say or

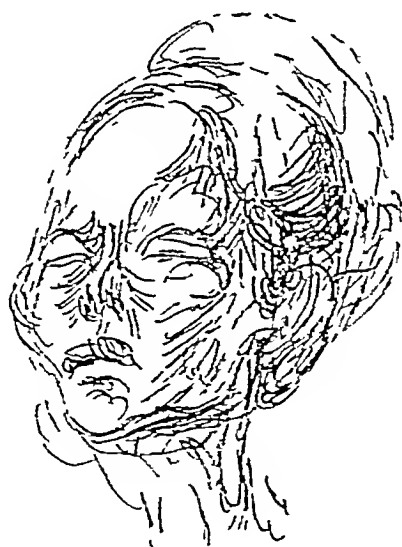


what she will do When she is near, the condemned man flings himself in her path.)

MAUNG DAW. Gracious Queen, plead for me. When you passed a while ago you turned away your face and uttered a bitter dolorous word as though you foresaw and pitied my failure But I did not understand and now I must die.

(At this enigmatic plea, Sawlon shows a sign of agitation, shrinking away from the Maung Daw as from an evil portent)

SAWLON (more to herself than in answer to his plea) We are all on the road to death. (For a fleeting instant her glance rests upon the King Resuming her slow pace, her body now stiffened hieratically, her face like a mask, she says as she passes the group.) Death . . . Death . . . Death (She utters the word first with indifference, then with



horror and then with triumph They watch her leave as if hallucinated and before she disappears hear her add in a whisper) Life is a very terrible adventure

NARATHIHAPATE (after a pause, harshly to Yazathingyan and Opbla). Take the Maung Daw away and destroy him. And have his Councillor pursued Go Leave me alone with the Lady Saw, who from this instant shall be styled Queen Saw (Yazathingyan, Opbla, the Guardsman and the Maung Daw go out.

The King turns to Queen Saw and speaks with growing excitement)
 Death, death—you heard her, that woman! Whose death?
 His death? But she uttered it thrice Why did he say that she
 pitied his failure? You saw how she darted her glance at me?
 My death? My death! No, no! That cannot be! Already the
 secret of invulnerability is mine (*he goes close, speaking into her*
face) When the villains seized me, they stared stark murder I
 saw the blackness In the wink of an eye the horror of the
 mountain returned upon me I beheld in close menace the
 foreshadowed death as if the good augury of your coming could
 not undo it So it was I doubted, when suddenly I felt your
 touch and my whole being was flooded with safety Their
 grasp fell from me, they could do nothing and fled If they,
 having me in their very hands, were helpless, what can
 Sawlon do? Or any other? The path is clear Heaven has
 certainly relented The prospect opens. One secret is re-
 vealed, the rest will be vouchsafed and I shall triumph in
 every quarter!

(*He is so exalted and overwrought, that he seems about to drop, as if in*
a seizure Queen Saw supports him from the scene like a woman tending a
man who is ill)

End of Act I



Act II

Late afternoon in one of the private apartments of the Palace of Pagan. This inner room is both sumptuous and simple in effect. The walls are hung with scenes from the life of the Buddha, immense paintings on cloth, like tapestries or frescoes, scenes such as his birth, his departure from his father's palace, his enlightenment under the Bo Tree, his temptation by Mara and his passing into Nirvana. In them are a multitude of figures, animals, buildings, trees. It is these hangings, reaching up to a high carved ceiling, which give the apartment its sumptuousness, for the furniture and appointments are simple, being a low couch-dais covered with gold cloth and strewn with cushions, a number of carpets and a few red lacquer tables with legs only a foot high. There are no windows, but a



curtained doorway is in the centre of each wall. Seated on the couch-dais is King Narathihapate. He is dressed in a skirt of stiff silk decorated with formal patterns in brick-red and yellow, a tight jacket of white muslin flared at the shoulders and hips and disclosing beneath a vest of emerald silk. On his head is a hat shaped like a cone and made of cloth of gold, a replica of the crown. He is engaged in conversation with a stout ecclesiastic of extraordinary aspect. This man, a magician named Theinmazi, is wearing the yellow robe, but it is made of silk not cotton, and is em-

broidered with black flowers. His head is not shaven but adorned with curls. His face is rouged with santal powder. In his ears are immense earrings, their pendants in the form of women's breasts. And there cling to him two girls of small stature and ribald appearance, scantily



robed but heavily jewelled and painted. He is seated at his ease on a carpet below the dais, the girls on each side of him, slightly behind, their long supple fingers fondling his neck. His creased evil face is alive with cunning. He is probably a little drugged.

THEINMAZI (*in his rich voice*). Your Majesty is worried.

NARATHIHAPATE (*morosely*) I am worried, Theinmazi That is why I have sent for you

THEINMAZI (*in a tone as cheering as wine*) But Your Majesty has not the smallest reason for despondency Wherever I go among the villages or where the flowering trees dip into the streams, Your Majesty's name is spoken with awe

NARATHIHAPATE That may be But what of the Court? I have noticed little adulation here

THEINMAZI It will come. Your Majesty is but at the beginning of your rise.

NARATHIHAPATE When I brought you here, promoted and gave you money, you made me some very wonderful promises What has become of them? Am I nearer my goal? I hardly think so That is what depresses me

THEINMAZI (*with a pleasant laugh in which his women join*) To boil water the element of fire is not enough. The element of time is also required.

NARATHIHAPATE It is some time now since you began your operations

THEINMAZI Some time, yes, Your Majesty, but not long In a small conjuration results are immediate, and it will be allowed that I obtained them in manifestations such as voices, spectres, sweet odours and the like On the occasions when the Royal Foot has honoured my chapel, the phenomena were as I had promised After the dancers and music had woven the web, the Royal Hands were seen to be full of lotus flowers All those present were deeply impressed

NARATHIHAPATE Yes, they were impressed, but most of them were women or attendants, and Queen Saw refused to come The Chief Minister was not impressed when he heard of it nor, the least bit, the Chief Queen, Sawlon With the great secrets it would have been otherwise But there has been no hint of them

THEINMAZI (*leaning forward confidentially*). Your Majesty has mentioned the Chief Minister Have I permission to be very plain?

NARATHIHAPATE Go on, Theinmazi Speak out I wish you always did You are generally so vague

THEINMAZI (*with a sly smirk*) To build a pagoda, a scaffolding is necessary, but when the building is finished, the scaffolding is removed

NARATHIHAPATE There you go with your riddles! What are you talking about?

THEINMAZI (*with the gesture of a conjurer, which his women copy*) The Chief Minister He was the scaffolding without which my Lord could not have become King But he is still standing, uselessly, harmfully standing, for he obscures the view of the royal splendour

NARATHIHAPATE. But can he be removed? Tell me that! If he could I would get rid of him tomorrow

THEINMAZI (*astutely*) Should Your Majesty suddenly dismiss him, he would be so surprised that he would have to go

NARATHIHAPATE Perhaps you are right But an excuse would have to be found

THEINMAZI (*confidently*) That will present itself Perhaps he will again fail in his police duties, as when through his negligence Your Majesty was nearly murdered

NARATHIHAPATE (*thoughtfully*) He has a wide knowledge of affairs, as Queen Saw once said; he might be difficult to replace

THEINMAZI (*with infinite cunning*) For Your Majesty to obtain the last secrets, it may be well to make me sole adviser

NARATHIHAPATE (*suddenly angry*) Is that why you are holding them back? You want the Chief Ministership before you reveal them?

THEINMAZI (*in an emotional tone*) Ah! if Your Majesty knew how I have been toiling, you would not have spoken thus!

I had thought to reveal a great secret in the chapel next time, but see I had better do it now. (*he pauses dramatically*) I have roused Tepathin from his long slumber!

NARATHIHAPATE (*with excitement*). Tepathin, the Guardian Spirit of the Tharaba Gate?

THEINMAZI (*solemnly*). Even that ancient and invincible spectre After my conjuration he rose from the moat and now is lodged aloft in the gate-house I can direct him and he must obey, for the words that long ago made him a slave, I have recovered and know how to utter

NARATHIHAPATE (*transported*). Ah! when shall I see him?

THEINMAZI In the chapel, whatever time Your Majesty commands.

NARATHIHAPATE (*with contrition*). Theinmazi, I have wronged you You are indeed faithful You have toiled for me manfully With Tepathin in the van of my elephants, I am invincible!

THEINMAZI (*in a thrilling voice*). With Tepathin in the van you may become Lord of the Three Worlds, as was the old King Gatatanalayaka who in galloping battle routed the Angels

NARATHIHAPATE (*shouting*). Routed the Angels! Ah! Routed the Angels!

THEINMAZI. So sure am I that such things will be that I have drawn the style of Lord of the Three Worlds to set it now above the throne, for to bear a great style helps to induce its qualities, a law of magic, let me tell Your Majesty (*he takes from a fold in his robe a red lacquer plaque on which the words 'Lord of the Three Worlds' are inscribed in black*) At sight of this all will acknowledge your power and even Queen Sawlon will raise worshipping hands. (*He gives the plaque to one of his female attendants and she stands behind the King, holding it aloft As if overcome with admiration or as if indeed the style had a magic power, Theinmazi prostrates himself His other female attendant does likewise, but in her case she behaves as if seized with frenzy in a ritual orgy and*

in a most indecorous manner writhes on the carpet, uttering cries and exposing herself)

NARATHIHAPATE (*his lips moving in prayer*) Tepathin lead me to universal sovereignty!

(At this moment Queen Sawlon enters from a side door attended as before by her train. Wrapped though she is in the contemplation of some inscrutable image of herself, she is arrested by the spectacle that meets her eyes and stops)

SAWLON What is this?

NARATHIHAPATE Cannot you see what is written, Queen?

SAWLON I can see it

NARATHIHAPATE Read it out that I may hear it

SAWLON I will not read it out

NARATHIHAPATE (*becoming agitated*) Why will you not? It is true Theinmazi has enchained for me Tepathin again and with his help no man can vanquish me.

SAWLON (*with horror and repulsion*). That you should be invincible on this earth, I can bear, for there is Paradise But if in Paradise too you were Lord, where could I hide? Not even in Hell, for over that domain also would you lord it

NARATHIHAPATE When I am become Lord of those three domains, you shall bow to me

SAWLON Never! Never!

(And turning she goes out)

NARATHIHAPATE (*furiously to Theinmazi*) Get up! Stop groveling there! What is the good? You promised Queen Sawlon would raise worshipping hands! You heard what she said?

THEINMAZI (*recovering his former posture and signing to the female attendant to rejoin him with the plaque*) She did not deny Your Majesty's power

NARATHIHAPATE But she defied it

THEINMAZI (*in a soothing voice*) When Your Majesty wears the triple crown, she will think otherwise Meanwhile, if I may advise, no more at present should be said of this mystery In

due time and in proper form the event will be established. Your Majesty is already possessed of two great secrets, invulnerability and invincibility, for the Lady who was of Falling Flowers and now is a Queen is symbol of the one, and Tepathin of the Tharaba Gate of the other. If, when the last secrets are revealed, the Chief Queen is still defiant, Your Majesty will know what to do.

NARATHIHAPATE Nevertheless, I would rather that she bowed.

(There is a sudden burst of music outside, drums, gongs, and the sweet chords of a harp. The King listens, his mind swaying between suspicion and pleasure.) What is that music? Go to the door, Theinmazi, and look. I never know what is going on. *(Theinmazi leaves his carpet and, accompanied by his two female counterparts, who support him, goes to the entrance on the right. As he does so, two little dogs tear into the room and out through the door at the other side.)* Those are Queen Saw's dogs! Is she out there?

THEINMAZI *(at the door)* Yes, Your Majesty. She is in the Great Hall.

NARATHIHAPATE *(eagerly)* What is she doing? What is happening?

THEINMAZI She is receiving a Chinese. He is showing her what is in a box.

NARATHIHAPATE In a box? Is he a merchant? Beg her to come in and bring the Chinaman with her.

THEINMAZI *(evidently speaking to a door-keeper)* Inform the Queen Saw that His Majesty will receive her. *(he returns to the foot of the couch-dais, his robe fluttering about his females)* With Your Majesty's permission, I will now withdraw.

NARATHIHAPATE *(surprised)* Do you not want to see what is in the box?

THEINMAZI *(slightly discomposed)* The Queen Saw may not wish to find me here. *(almost in an aside)* She is a very clever woman. *(As the curtain over the door on the right is drawn back for the Queen's entry, he and his females scurry out through the left door. There enters at*

once Queen Saw, less elegantly dressed than was Queen Sawlon, but withal a striking figure in a trailing damask gown split to the knee, a silvered jacket worn long and much flared, and a headdress in the form of a jewelled pineapple. Her dogs are with her. She is ushered in by her ladies, with her musicians in the rear. Behind walks the Chinese, a tall, strongly built man, clad in a dove-grey silk robe with a scarlet waist band, black slippers and a hat somewhat like a black beret, with spikes on each side stretching out horizontally a full foot. His face is clever, amiable and gentlemanly. With him is a servant carrying the box.)

SAW (with the spontaneous open warmth which has won all hearts). Your Majesty has sent for me. And, indeed, I was about to make my presence known when my naughty dogs did it for me. (The King, dominated by her robust and charming mood, laughs. She sits beside him.) I have with me a stranger whom Your Majesty will welcome. (She motions the Chinese to approach. He comes forward and makes a ceremonial kowtow, thereafter sitting on the carpet below the dais.) His name is Yang, and at one time he was Grand Secretary at the Court of China.

NARATHIHAPATE A Grand Secretary? I thought he was a merchant. What then is in the box?

YANG (in the manner of a man used to Courts) A few trifles unworthy of Your Majesty's acceptance.



NARATHIHAPATE (to Saw, reproachfully) He brings presents! And you did not tell me at once that he had come! Is he an envoy from the Emperor?



SAW No, he is a private person The presents he offers are on his own behalf

NARATHIHAPATE (*a little disappointed*) I thought the Emperor might have heard of my rising power and wished to be the first to win my friendship But no matter That will come Show me the presents.

YANG (*opening the box and laying out some articles*). Here are silks, flowered silks such as were in use at our Court

SAW (*fingering them*) How soft and transparent!

YANG (*gallantly*) If Your Majesty deigns to wear them, they will appear yet softer

NARATHIHAPATE What is that green thing at the bottom of the box?

YANG (*lifting out a large porcelain plate*) A plate, Your Majesty, yet more than a plate, for it is said to have a strange property, being one of those renowned platters so much sought after by the Kings of the Islands and of India

NARATHIHAPATE (*in an eager voice*) I have heard of plates that give sight of future events, if held in the hand Can it do that?

YANG It can do better than prophesy, for it is said to reveal present danger

NARATHIHAPATE (*his eyes flickering*) Danger?

YANG The danger of poison

NARATHIHAPATE (*with a catch of breath*) A poison dish! Ah! how I have longed to possess one! (*he handles it in rapture*) In what manner does this one give warning?

YANG By changing colour from green to blue When the owner sees that signal, he knows that the food on it is poisoned

NARATHIHAPATE I shall send for poison and you shall show me

YANG (*ingeniously*) That I cannot do, for it is rather the intent to poison that it reveals than poison itself

NARATHIHAPATE A plot, a plot to poison?

YANG Even so, Your Majesty, and the reason why Kings obtain these plates when they can

NARATHIHAPATE (*fervently*) And a good reason!

SAW The Grand Secretary has a favour to beg.

NARATHIHAPATE. A favour? Well, let him do so. (*to Yang*)

But you have not yet explained what has brought you here

YANG (*in a serious tone*). I am a fugitive The Court, the imperial city, of my master, the Chinese Emperor, fell these late years to the Tartars, who looted and destroyed and burnt and massacred I was among those few who escaped I travelled over mountains and wastes and rivers and at last reached in safety Your Majesty's borders. There one of the Princes showed me much kindness and taught me to speak your eminent language But this year he was killed by Tartar raiders Thereafter, I crossed the frontier and now seek asylum with Your Majesty

NARATHIHAPATE. You have done wisely to come to a safe place.

SAW. Will Your Majesty bestow on him a post at Court?

That is the favour he would most value And his advice will be advantageous, for if the Tartars have taken the Chinese capital, and now are raiding on our marches, they may advance still further and threaten our capital.

NARATHIHAPATE No fear of that The distance is too great

YANG The Tartars have advanced in their time greater distances.

NARATHIHAPATE (*with a sharp look*) Has their King elephants?

YANG (*surprised*) No, Your Majesty

NARATHIHAPATE Then what can he do against our embattled beasts?

YANG (*tactfully*) Your Majesty's elephants would trample him, no doubt, should he make the attempt

NARATHIHAPATE (*with a laugh*) That he will never dare.
(*aside to Queen Saw*) Just now Theinmazi told me a secret
We are forever inexpugnable

SAW. That man! Has he been with the King?

NARATHIHAPATE Ah! Saw, you should not mistrust him.
'Tis on him and you that all depends.

SAW (*doubtfully*) What did he say?

NARATHIHAPATE He warned me not to speak of it, but I shall tell you later in private. And now, to reward this man for his plate, which indeed I do much value, more especially that it comes through you, who thus extend your protection over me. He shall have a post. (*to Yang*) You shall advise me on fireworks. The Chinese, I've heard, make rockets that sail as high as the vultures. I shall need what is best to celebrate my victory, should the Tartars be mad enough to attack me.

YANG (*with spirit*) Your Majesty shall have rockets to startle the stars.

(*Queen-Saw makes as if to withdraw*)

NARATHIHAPATE (*in a complaining tone*). Why do you leave me?

SAW. It is past Your Majesty's hour for attending to state business. The Chief Minister has been waiting for audience.

NARATHIHAPATE (*petulantly*) Do not speak to me of that man.

I will not see him. May not a King take advice where he likes?

SAW (*evenly*) But he should beware of evil counsel.

NARATHIHAPATE (*giving her a disturbed glance*). Cannot you be more indulgent to Theinmazi? Well, let the Minister come.

But it is growing late. Why has my supper not been brought in?

SAW (*to one of her ladies*). Tell them to bring in the royal repast.

And send word to the Chief Minister.

(*The Lady goes out.*)

NARATHIHAPATE (*looking again at the green plate*) I will eat from this plate (*to Yang*) Does it improve the taste of food?

YANG. All Chinese porcelain has that magic.

NARATHIHAPATE. Ah! The Court of China, a magical place!

How did it fall to the Tartar hordes? Had the Emperor no guardian spirits at his call?

YANG The ancestral spirits, alas! forsook us

NARATHIHAPATE They are no good Now I have slave spirits, more especially one whose name I will not say. Were all else to fail, he must stand, for spells of power compel him to serve me

YANG I humbly beg to congratulate Your Majesty.

(Servants bring dishes of food on trays and stand waiting on each side of the dais Queen Sawlon enters with her train)

NARATHIHAPATE *(starting)* You have come back!

SAWLON It is supper-time and I have come to watch the King make his repast, as is customary

(The disquieting effect of her presence upon him seems to please her)

NARATHIHAPATE. A custom that long since you have discontinued

SAWLON But am now resuming

NARATHIHAPATE *(with hope in his voice)* Ah! you are bending. May it be so

SAWLON It is not so

NARATHIHAPATE *(wildly)* Why then, oh! why have you come? What whim has taken you?

SAWLON It is my pleasure tonight to conform to the regulations

(She seats herself by the King on the couch-dais)

NARATHIHAPATE *(to Saw, in an agitated whisper)* Watch well, for I know that she desires my death

(He is shaking)

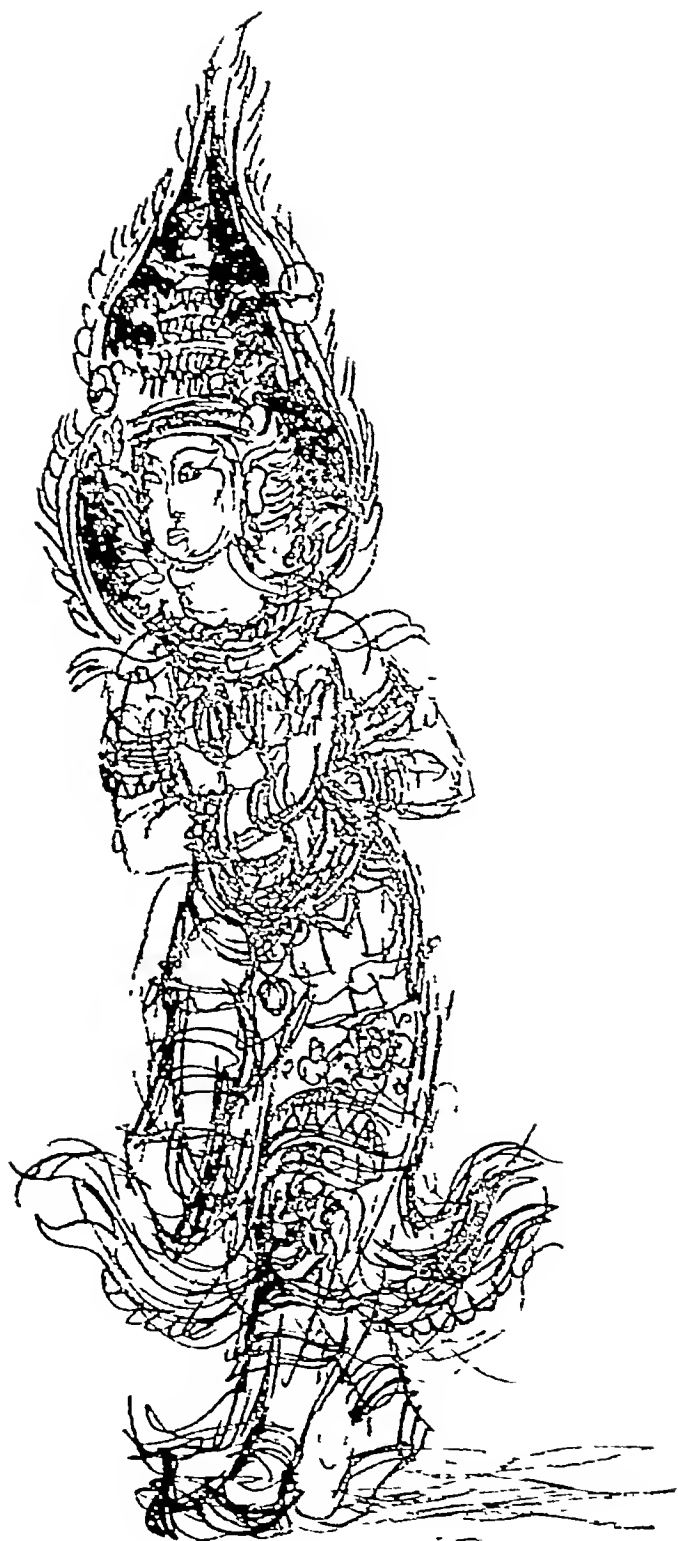
SAW The King should calm himself What will the foreign Excellency think?

(Enter Yazathingyan and Ophla They kneel at a distance)

NARATHIHAPATE *(to Yazathingyan)* Are all precautions taken for the night?

YAZATHINGYAN Yes, Sir Both the Inner and the Outer Guard are at their stations, as my son will testify

OPHLA Your servant has been the rounds All is in place



NARATHIHAPATE When I have eaten, I will attend to business
(He signs that they serve him A large circular tray has been placed before him on the dais On this his Chinese plate is laid The servants now hand the dishes to the Ladies both of the Chief Queen's and Queen Saw's train, and these pass them to their mistresses, who display them to the King in turn He shakes his head two or three times, but seeing some shrimps, says) I will have those



(Sawlon puts them on the Chinese plate)

SAW *(complacently)* Your favourite dish

NARATHIHAPATE. Yes And they agree with me I can eat any amount.

(But he does not at once begin to eat)



SAW Is the King not hungry ?

(But Narathihapate is staring at his green plate He continues to stare Suddenly he shudders and shuffling back speaks in a terrified voice)

NARATHIHAPATE The plate is changing colour! It is becoming blue! It is blue! with a sweep of his hand he brushes the shrimps onto the floor and steps closer to the plate Blue! Blue! Sawlon

you have done this. (*He gets up and, stepping onto the floor, trembles violently as he looks about him like a hunted animal. The Queens have risen also. Sawlon stands a little apart regarding him sardonically. Saw goes to him and places her hand on his arm. He cries out, as he cried in the previous scene.*) Safe! Safe! You have saved me, Saw, again. Without the plate you got me, I were now in torment.

(*He covers his face with his hands.*)

SAW Your Majesty is unwell. Your hands are burning. Let me take you to lie down. I will call the physician.

NARATHIHAPATE (*distraught*) I have had the narrowest escape from death! You saw how the plate changed colour.

SAW (*trying to reason with him*) It did not change. Look, (*taking it up*) how green it is. The rice fields of August are no greener.

NARATHIHAPATE That it is green again now is nothing. Having warned me it resumed its former hue. You did not see it change? I tell you, as soon as ever she put the shrimps on it, a blue haze suffused it. You did not see. You were not looking. It was as blue as any turquoise. There is no doubt. She planned to poison me.

SAW The Chief Queen can have had no such intention. You asked for shrimps and she served you, that is all.

NARATHIHAPATE. Ah! that was her cunning. It was my favourite dish. She knew that well. She had tampered with them. (*he turns and confronts Sawlon*) What have you to say? You came in so strangely. You would not answer. You came in to do me to death!

SAWLON (*regarding him with contempt*) Has the King taken leave of his senses? Where is the poison? Let the shrimps be examined. Try them on a dog. Try them on a slave. Try them on anyone. It is quite safe.

(*Her tone of sarcasm is most wounding. It whips the King.*)

NARATHIHAPATE (*in a screaming voice*) Bring me the shrimps!
(*All search for them on the floor, but they cannot be found.*)

SAW (forcing a laugh) My dogs must have eaten them But, as you see, they are none the worse

(In the hope of distracting the King's attention, she signals to her musicians, who are stationed near the door, to strike up They break into a lively tune)



NARATHIHAPATE (speaking like a madman) Stop that music (the musicians stop) Attempted murder has been committed, murder of a King, the most heinous crime that is known to man You cannot find the shrimps, but the Chief Queen's ladies have seen to that, no doubt. (turning to Sawlon with terrible eyes) Plead! Plead for your life!

SAWLON (with an implacable face) Never!

NARATHIHAPATE Plead, I say, or you are lost!

SAWLON Never!

NARATHIHAPATE (crying out) My Amazons! My Amazons! (his Amazons of the Inner Guard rush in) Arrest the Chief Queen! (they lay hold of her) Take her away! I do not want to see her face again! (The Amazons begin to force her out)

SAWLON Stop! Do not drag me! If go I must, I will go at my own pace and properly with my women (to the King) Without an atom of cause you would take my life away



(*As she says this, she shows for the first time in her voice and gesture some sign of weakness*)

NAKATHIHAPATI (*perceiving this with delight*) Plead and I will listen Beg for mercy and I will pardon you

SAW LON (*recovering herself*) Never! Never!

NARATHIHAPATI (*terrified*) Are you not afraid?

SAW LON (*full master of herself and speaking with her old darkness*) If I am afraid, then should you also be most horribly afraid

NARATHIHAPATI (*uttering a piercing cry*)

Take her! Take her! Kill her! Kill her!

(*The Amazon Guard runs with her from the room Her waiting women follow in a huddled group The King in his frenzy now turns upon Yazathirgyan and his son*) Heh, there,

Chief Minister! And you, Captain of the Outer Guard!

(*They rise, advance, and kneel again They appear amazed*) This is the second time Had you been doing your inspections with care, the Maung Daw could not have lain in wait Had you and your worthless son had eyes, poisoned food could not have been brought in here Go! Your appointments are taken from you This very night shall you set out for a perpetual banishment in the South

(*So astonished are they and unprepared, that they leave the presence without a word of protest The King watches them go, when suddenly he totters and falls back on the couch-dais in a half faint Queen Saw now signs to two ladies to attend him She is the only person who has kept her head during this wild scene The waiting women and musicians have thrown themselves on the ground Yang has drawn aside from prudence and old experience It has grown dusk and no lights have been brought in*)

SAW Let him rest Fan him but gently And send word to the Amazons to stay their hand until his seizure is past (*A lady-in-waiting hastens on the errand The King lies still, breathing heavily He is no longer conscious. Queen Saw turns towards*



Yang with a wry smile) What a mad place you have chosen to take refuge in!

YANG (*coming forward*) There is one sane person here at least

SAW But that one feels her reason threatened Will you be able to breathe this close air? Some other Court you might find more tolerable.

YANG (*with feeling*) But would so gracious a Queen be there!

I will stay with more joy than I thought ever to know again

SAW (*gently*) Stay then And I shall lean on you, for there is no man in this fantastical palace for me to speak with plainly

(*The lady-in-waiting runs in and cries in a horrified voice*)

LADY I was too late. They have killed her

(*Queen Saw sinks down weeping*)

SAW Ah! how can I bear it! What shall I do! That I should have to watch such a crime and be powerless to stop it!

(*Her women seek to comfort her. One of them says*)

LADY. You are now Chief Queen The whole Court will rejoice

SAW. Would I were back with my father at home!

LADY You will not desert us!

SECOND LADY. Without your hand the King would run wild

YANG Your Majesty ought not to give way to grief Such things happen at Courts. Kings are incalculable But though their nature is to break loose and commit excesses, they can mostly be restrained, if they have a mentor whom they respect Your Majesty fills that indispensable rôle

SAW To offer good advice and see it rejected—that is to be a King's mentor!

YANG But not always rejected, Madam Moreover, a mentor's name is not diminished because his counsel is disregarded That you strove to save the Chief Queen will be remembered always

LADIES (*with heartfelt admiration*) Always remembered, most dear Lady

SAW (*to Yang*) If I am to be the King's mentor, then you shall



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be mine And your duty shall be to keep my spirits up, or I swear that I will go back to my village, for I cannot bear cruelties, and confusion, and unreason, and falsities, and malice, and injustice and devilment

YANG (*fervently*) Count on my utmost devotion, Madam.

(*The King opens his eyes and, sitting up, glances about him with an expression of terror*)

NARATHIHAPATE (*panting*) What is that? Who is that? Oh, it is you! I have had such a dream! (*One of the women wipes the sweat from his forehead*) I was falling, I had fallen to a dark hollow I heard rustling, but could not ward off what was coming No one could ward it off but Sawlon, and I cried for her help Suddenly she came flying through the air

SAW (*in a hard voice*) Lie down again and rest These are imaginings Sawlon is dead What can she do for you now, your dead wife?

(*The King lies down But as soon as his eyes are shut, he cries out miserably and sits up again*)

NARATHIHAPATE (*in a raving voice*) I cannot rest, I dare not rest! What was it that I saw? Can it be that her spirit is about? Can she harm me now? An old man once told me in the forest that by killing a woman one increases her power Can that be so? Though dead, can she still compass my death?

SAW (*vehemently*). No, no! Compose yourself (*She attempts to press him down on the couch.*)

NARATHIHAPATE (*shaking her off*) I tell you, I felt myself lying there helpless As plain as day I was lying in a hollow place helpless with her circling about me I should not have called out for her My cry invoked her from I know not whence Her eyes were the same eyes and looked with the same disdain She loosed something at me, as from a bow

(*At these words Queen Saw shudders and her women moan with fright They peer into the shadowy corners, afraid of what they may see*)

A LADY Something is there, I think!

SAW (*turning to Yang for support*) We must leave this room, get away from here quickly

(*He goes to her But there now enters from the door on the left the Royal Chaplain with a novice behind him All kneel as he advances slowly towards them When he comes to a stop, he raises his right hand, the palm outward, the fingers raised, in the gesture called 'The Abatement of Fear'*)

CHAPLAIN. To the Royal Disciples, peace and peace.

(*The King gets off the couch-dais*)

NARATHIHAPATE (*kneeling and touching the Chaplain's feet*) Master, comfort me I do not know what has befallen me As I had the right, I put Queen Sawlon to death She tried to poison me, she tried to trample on me Other Kings have done the like and so got rid of what troubled them But I have not been able to void my agony She disdains me still, for I have seen her Though now she cannot poison me, yet may she by hidden means drag me to death

CHAPLAIN (*making the gesture of the teacher with his right hand and speaking with calm authority*) What has befallen you is what befalls a man who goes from the sunlight into a dark cave' He cannot see to mind his steps nor the dangers that may lurk there In youth I taught you the Four Cardinal Virtues, equanimity and joy in others' happiness, compassion for all creatures and benevolence You knew how to recite the Three Gems, 'I take refuge in the Buddha, the Law, and the Church' But when you became King, you sought to assert yourself, spurned my advice and took evil counsel Wherefore your mind is tormented by confusion

NARATHIHAPATE (*weeping violently*) True, Master! Oh, true, Master!

CHAPLAIN But your mind will be cleared and its peace restored if you follow the Law of Right Effort, preached by the Lord Omniscient himself (*Here the Chaplain changes his tone and chants the classical exhortation*) Strive to avert the spreading

of evil that hath arisen Strive to avert the arising of evil that hath not arisen Strive to aid the arising of good that hath not arisen. Strive to aid the spreading of good that hath arisen

(As the Chaplain enters upon this quotation, the leader of the musicians with wonderful feeling and skill accompanies him on his flute, the final words being saluted by a crescendo on gongs and cymbals After pronouncing them the Royal Chaplain turns and paces out the way he came)

NARATHIHAPATE (to Queen Saw with a supplicatory gesture)

Promise never to leave me Stay by me till the end

SAW (moved) I promise

End of Act II



Act III Scene I

Time has passed. The scene is a chamber in a watch-tower within the palace precincts. It resembles the palace chamber of the preceding Act except that the back wall opens onto a verandah, so that a wide view is visible of roof tops, a gateway and the plain beyond. The two side walls are again hung with painted cloth, but depict this time the battles of the ancient Kings, some of them legendary as those against giants and monsters, and some historical such as the subjugation of the South, when its elephantry went down in rout, a wild composition of flying trunks and trampled men. The only entrance is from the verandah, to which a staircase leads from below, coming up on the left. On the right of the verandah is visible another staircase leading to the floor above. The furniture is even sparser than before, consisting of a few carpets and cushions, a low table or two, a few pots with flowering bushes and a



laquer screen. Queen Saw is seated towards the right with two of her ladies in front of the screen. She is slightly more plump and her air is

more womanish She is not wearing the ornate headdress of the last act, her hair being without covering and coiled in three knots with tails Her clothes, too, are simpler, her jacket being less stiffly flared and the silk of her dress less gorgeously embroidered She is reading a scroll, one of several on a tray beside her The sun is westering

SAW (*putting down the scroll*) I did not know he was so good a poet My father is a poet, too, though he has never written a line But Yang has the gift of language

A LADY What was that poem about, dear Queen?

SAW (*as she takes up another scroll*) Oh, his favourite theme, you know, the delights of retirement in the hills Though he has lived so long at Courts and mixed with the first gentlemen, his heart has always been set on a retreat at last among the mists and waterfalls That is why I love his poems so much
(*She reads again*)

SECOND LADY (*with a pout*) A mountain pavilion by a cascade wouldn't be much fun if you had no one to share it with!

FIRST LADY Yes, those places are rather damp and lonely if you go by yourself

SAW (*smiling over the top of the scroll*) I don't think he wants to be that sort of hermit (*She glances at the scroll again and then puts it down, her eyes very bright*)

SECOND LADY (*slyly*) It would be lovely if

Your Majesty would read out a bit of that one

SAW (*carelessly*) I don't care for it so much

(*However, she puts it into the breast of her jacket The Queen's father is now seen emerging from the staircase onto the verandah. He enters the room, his gentle face eager and affectionate, and comes towards her*)

FATHER The door-keeper at the bottom said you were alone

SAW (*breathlessly happy*) Father! Why, I was speaking of you only a minute ago! You have come straight from the village?
(*She makes him sit on her carpet*)



FATHER Yes, I left Falling Flowers at first light.

SAW. How is all there? It seems a myriad years I've been away

FATHER (*with charming complacency*) The harvest was wonderful
The vivid green of August turned naturally to the yellow of
October It was a sight of gold

SAW (*with a sigh*) Why do you come so seldom to see me?
My thoughts are always with the village, with you and my
mother, the scents and the flowers. Is my bush still in the
garden, the bush without which I should not be here?

FATHER It is now a big shrub, but never since has flowered in
three colours

SAW How bright was that flowering, how deceptive its
promise!

FATHER It truly foretold your greatness

SAW Not greatness I went dedicated to protect but now the
darkness falls apace (*bursting out*) Since last I saw you all has
become much more sombre After the death of Sawlon the
King was quieted for a while He had looked into an abyss
and for the moment drew back. Then he appointed Thein-
mazi First Minister

FATHER But he still looked to you

SAW His mind is so unstable One day I could persuade him,
the next was all undone by his weak presumption But I
might have got him to recall Yazathingyan, had not the old
man died And then the Tartar envoys came!

FATHER It was rumoured they went back dissatisfied

SAW (*exclaiming*). Dissatisfied! Why, they were in a mortal
rage! They asked a treaty and nominal tribute, but the King,
though I begged him to settle, insulted and threatened them
Blinded by Theinmazi's fantastic promises he dared the
great Kublai Khan to come on And now a Tartar army has
crossed the frontier! And our own has marched north to
meet it

FATHER (*much startled*) I did not know of that

SAW You are so wrapped in your sweet dreams of beauty Yes, the Tartars are upon us I have utterly failed to preserve the state Battle now will decide the event (*in a despairing voice*) My task was thankless, and I have finished with it (*wildly*) Now, this very hour, I will return to the village! Let the King manage as best he can

FATHER (*earnestly*) But you have not failed Character, not success, is the measure of greatness You will be an example for all Queens that follow

SAW (*greatly cheered*) Shall I be?

FATHER You have stood for sense and moderation You have endured with patience You have done all that a woman could do

SAW (*her spirit rising again*) Then I shall endure a while longer Moreover, I promised the King that I would stay with him till the end For so he has often begged me, believing that my presence is proof against death And when I promised him, I remembered, too, that you, at the moment when I was setting out, laid this very task upon me

FATHER I have forgotten

SAW. Nevertheless, truly you did 'Do not tire or despair but strive to the end,' you said And I said 'Sustain me, Father' And you answered 'As I can' I have recalled your words before when I was near giving up (*She embraces him and sobs*)

FATHER (*very gently*) When the time comes I shall be waiting for you at Falling Flowers (*He also weeps*)

SAW (*after a pause*) Go urgently now, and tell the Headman that I desire him to look to his stockade The Tartars will not attack so remote a place, but he should be on his guard against marauders (*She accompanies him to the stair-head When he has gone down, she leans on the railing of the verandah and looks out over the plain Presently she turns to her ladies*) There is dust rising far to the northward

FIRST LADY A dust storm?

SAW (*solemnly*) Perhaps the dust of battle

(*Yang now descends by the stairway from the upper chamber of the tower. He is wearing the Burmese dress of a Comptroller of the Household*)

YANG (*warmth and respect in his voice*) The King is shortly coming down from the tower-top. He is exhausted with watching the plain for a courier

SAW Has no news come of the army?

YANG. No news. And the absence of news has much worried him. His mind is in turmoil
(*They sit down.*)

SAW. What do you yourself think? Has the army a chance of stopping the invader?

YANG (*gloomily*) No army has been able to withstand the Tartar bowmen. But, of course, they have never had to deal with elephants before

SAW That is the King's great argument. Is he possibly right to be confident?

YANG (*with a sigh*). To tell how elephants will stand up to Tartar arrows requires a knowledge both of beasts and archery. And I have neither. But it would be a miracle if the Tartars, who have ranged the wide world, were checked in Burma

SAW (*after a pause*) My father was here a moment ago. When I saw him I was seized with an intense desire to go home. I felt I must get into the hills at once. Perhaps your poems had something to do with that. (*She gives him a deep revealing smile*)

YANG They pleased you?

SAW Yes. Very much. . .

YANG (*earnestly*). Tell me what you thought.

SAW. You gave lovely utterance to all my dream

YANG (*with emotion*) You were the inspiration that lifted me.

SAW No! No! You were lifted on language

YANG I could not have found the language alone.

SAW Yes, for your dream has been ever a divine landscape.

YANG Unpeopled till I met you (*in a low voice*) Why do we linger? There is nothing more that either of us can accomplish. Let us go now to the hills, your home.

SAW (*softly*) Not yet. I have still a duty to perform. I must stay with the King as long as he is here. To desert him now would seem too like fear and would not become me, who promised to stand by him. You supported your Lord till he fell, though he deserved, you have told me, no better than mine.

YANG (*fervently*) You are right. My longing overcame me. How strong you are! How much to be admired!

SAW. It was my father who gave me the strength. And he said 'I shall be waiting for you at Falling Flowers.'

YANG. Happy will be the day when I meet him there.

(*There enters from the upper staircase the King. His face is haggard and dejected. Behind follow Amazons and Musicians.*)

NARATHIHAPATE (*in a distracted wailing voice*). No news! No news! Not a sign of a messenger. My eyes ache with staring to the northward. All the plain lies bathed in the hanging sun. The shadows are long like pointing lances. Soon again will night squeeze me in its shroud. That I could sleep away the hours till dawn! (*He crosses to a carpet in the centre and sits down heavily.*)

SAW (*going to sit near him*) No news is often good news. Had the army suffered a reverse, we should have known it already, for ill news travels with the speed of wild duck.

NARATHIHAPATE I had not thought of that (*quieted by her presence he becomes less agitated*) Get out the chessmen. The game wonderfully abridges time (*followers place a chessboard*) You think me over-anxious. I was not anxious when the army marched out. But delay will crowd the mind with fancies (*they begin to play*) Were not my elephants a glad sight in the van? You were not with me though, I remember. It was on



King Narabhi Khyapa

Tharaba Gate I was sitting They passed under me, trunks curled, or waving scimitars and, some, insignia, or banners inscribed with magical words. Fierce was the music, as fierce as their little eyes And I noted the omens They were all favourable Was I not right to expect victory?

SAW Very right. It is Your Majesty's move

NARATHIHAPATE (*taking one of her horsemen*). Your horsemen cannot withstand my assault. The Tartar bow men, of whom they talk so much, are mounted Let this be a sign of what will happen to them!

SAW (*smiling*) Your Majesty should not look for signs in a game. Supposing I were to win!

NARATHIHAPATE (*his mood rising*) You cannot win today, for this is my lucky day But you must try to win, that the good omen for me be the stronger.

SAW Do I not always try? If I often lose, it is because of Your Majesty's cunning tactics

NARATHIHAPATE (*with a laugh*) Cunning tactics That is what the Tartars will say when their horses bolt at the sight of my elephants (*altering his tone*) But more terrifying than theirs will be another sight Shall I tell you?

SAW. Please do

NARATHIHAPATE. It is secret

YANG Your Majesty desires me to withdraw out of earshot?

NARATHIHAPATE No, Yang You may listen Indeed, I want your close attention Your Emperor was not as well served as am I! (*raising rather than lowering his voice*) I was on Tharaba, as I said, Tephathin's gate, the Guardian Spirit's When the army had gone I sat on still, watching it wind over the plain, the dust streaming towards the river Dazedly, so I continued, when suddenly a sweet odour rose about me I looked down (*he is shaking with excitement*) Rising from the moat at the gate's foot was the figure of a man in the panoply of old days His face was lit with a reddish light, and a drawn sword was



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in his hand His eyes searched and found the army Then
with great bounds he scudded after it and in a flash was leading
the van

SAW (*shaken and bewildered*) Your Majesty saw Tepathin'

NARATHIHAPATE Aye, it was he

SAW They say he appears only when the city is in mortal
danger.

NARATHIHAPATE. It was Theinmazi who roused him And
when he knew of our danger, immediately he set out. With
him fighting, what chance have mortal men against me? Had
he not come, there were ground for disquiet, but his coming is
certain proof of victory

SAW Well, did I not beg you to be less anxious, when you
came in so downcast?

NARATHIHAPATE I had been brooding alone Now I know
that my triumph is assured. (*They play a few moves of the game,
when, it being the King's turn, he stares in consternation at the
board and cries*) You have mated me!

SAW (*who has been playing with only half her attention*) Surely not?
Cannot you move there? (*She points to a square*)

NARATHIHAPATE It is mate, I tell you!

SAW I was so absorbed by Your Majesty's story that I moved
at random The mate happened without my knowing.

NARATHIHAPATE (*deeply depressed, all his assurance gone*) Had
you tried and beaten me it would have been a bad sign To
beat me without trying is far worse

SAW. But this is foolish Neither of us was paying full attention

NARATHIHAPATE (*dully*) I was trying (*to Yang*) Go and look
out There is a messenger, perhaps

(*Yang goes to the verandah and stands looking towards the horizon*)

SAW. Will Your Majesty play again? If you win, we shall play
a third and so make all clear

NARATHIHAPATE I will play no more chess. Moreover I have
ordered Theinmazi to be here at sunset All day he has been

observing the signs and will report to me. If his signs are good, will that not be something?

SAW (*seeing him*) Certainly. They will outbalance the mate.

NARATHIHAPATE (*calling*) Yang, do you see anything?

YANG Nothing yet. But the sun has now dipped under the rim of the world and a mist is gathering in the folds of the plain.

NARATHIHAPATE (*to Saw*) Then Theinmazi will soon be here (*slowly*) I would rather it were Yazathingyan.

SAW (*surprised into indignation*) How can you say that? You who deprived him of his office and let him die in bitter exile!

NARATHIHAPATE. He was a man of such resource. Even now, at this late hour, he would smell a way out. He had a dog's nose.

SAW (*his inconstancy maddening her*) You do not then believe in Tepathin? Theinmazi's great promises mean nothing now?

NARATHIHAPATE (*with a wry smile*) One cannot altogether be sure of a spirit nor am I wholly certain of Theinmazi.

SAW (*derisively*) You do not trust him, though you have taken his advice this long while!

NARATHIHAPATE Only Yazathingyan now could save me. That I know, but he is dead.

SAW His son Ophla is alive. Why do you not recall him? He was the ablest of all your commanders. If we have to fall back from the capital, he could raise us a fresh army in the South instead of, as now, colloquing with malcontents, which is credibly rumoured.

NARATHIHAPATE (*wearily*) He, too, is gone actively against me. He who once swore to give his life for me!

SAW So it is said. But entice him back with generous offers.

NARATHIHAPATE I could not face him with his father dead in banishment.

SAW Then all turns on how the battle has gone.

NARATHIHAPATE But you do not doubt that we have won it? With Tepathin in the van how can we fail?

SAW (*driven frantic by his wavering mind*) Ah! Ah! Yes, we have won it, certainly won it

NARATHIHAPATE (*forcing himself to believe*) That is what I think. Have we ever lost a battle? Have my great ancestors ever sprawled in rout? (*pointing to the battles depicted on the hangings*) That is how they served even the most monstrous of their foes. They trampled them with rushing elephants. Shall I fare otherwise? It is not believable (*calling suddenly to his musicians*) Have you no songs to sing? Let me have martial music, old songs of triumph, what an army sings when it comes home victorious. Play me the march of the hero Alaungsithu (*The musicians prepare to play the march*) No, I cannot hear that! I cannot bear it! (*calling*) Yang, Yang! Do you see no one?

YANG It has grown dusk on the ground, for the light is now flung upward from the sunset

NARATHIHAPATE Because you are not looking you do not see. A messenger there must be. This is the hour when despatches arrive (*getting up from his place and going to the verandah*) I will look myself. Were there but one gleam I should see him. Even in the black of night I should know he had come (*He reaches the verandah and looks out. Then speaks rhapsodically in a high voice*) The Paradises are burning. Crimson their gardens, with pools of fire where should be lakes and lawns. It is the sack of the sky. Evil has burst up and the celestial spirits fly through the zenith in their flaming robes (*He turns about and advances into the chamber, his hands raised above his head, his eyes dark*) If Heaven is consumed and its angelic denizens are fled, how may we hope to maintain our halls? (*he sinks onto his carpet*) They will burn great Pagan as they are burning the sky! What way can we escape, where can we fly to?

(*He sobs violently. Theinmazi steps onto the verandah with his two satellites. He has the look of a man intoxicated by a hemp narcotic, for his eyes are blazing, his colour is ashen and he seems to dance rather than*

walk With a high staccato shout, he sweeps towards the King and flings himself on the ground.)



THEINMAZI Lord of the Three Worlds! Lord of the Three Worlds!

NARATHIHAPATI You are elated Your message is good?

THEINMAZI Victory! Victory!

NARATHIHAPATI Speak! I have suffered much all day, watching the horizon, hoping, waiting for you to come, doubting I have doubted Tepathin, the Guardian of the Gate, I have doubted my elephants, I have doubted you. This moment past, looking for news, the whole sky rose up against me, like a scarlet blossom it rose up and burst, like an enchanted orchid it scattered its petals to the Four Quarters I was amazed and horribly afraid (*He leans forward and drags Theinmazi's ear*)

THEINMAZI. Those were but portents of what is passing away Victory! I have seen it, with my eyes I saw it When we were gathered and had partaken of the liquor, when the musicians had played the exordium on the drums, when the dancers had come out and were already possessed, I pronounced words of power and sounded the conch At once I was carried higher than the highest tower The river wound immeasurably far, the water molten gold in the sun There stood the armies, face to face, Tepathin in our van as tall as a pillar Suddenly I perceived the elephants charge The arrows rattled against their armour, against their castles, against their pectorals Never were seen such clouding arrows But the great beasts went stamping on. And I heard a scream like

tearing silk and I saw the Tartars wheel their horses, and I saw them trampled, and I saw them no more

(Pronouncing these last words in a howling hallucinated voice, he seems to fall into a fit and lies quivering on the ground His two women tend him. During his speech they behave like demented creatures, each rise and fall of his voice rocking them, their gestures, little cries and grimaces being the closest reflection of his words But now that he has lost consciousness, they come to themselves, as if no longer possessed by his spirit, and in a normal methodical manner wipe his face and massage his body While Queen Saw and Yang have heard with aversion and scepticism his drugged harangue, the King has listened with fascinated excitement, his eyes flashing and his mien growing at each phrase more exalted)

NARATHIHAPATE (to Yang) Come here (Yang approaches nearer and kneels) Cause a proclamation to be issued at once, declaring that my troops have won a great victory State that the whole Tartar army is utterly destroyed, having been overrun by my incomparable elephants Summon the Council and all the officers of the Court to audience in the main hall Let no one absent himself, no matter for what duty I shall ascend the Lion Throne at midnight Meanwhile let the palace be illuminated and the fireworks got ready The Court dancers should prepare themselves, the Court fools rehearse Before dawn I will go in torch-light procession to the Ananda pagoda, where a pavilion shall be erected and where I will hold a banquet

SAW (who has come up and seated herself on the King's carpet). Your Majesty's programme of festivities could not be bettered Nevertheless, there is one point which may be considered Is it prudent to declare the victory before the receipt of the official despatches?

NARATHIHAPATE (displeased). Why should I delay? Have I not ample assurance that the Tartars are down?

SAW We have what Theinmazı says he saw, that is all

NARATHIHAPATE (*sharply*) Which is enough. How splendid his vision, and his utterance how shining!

SAW Visions are often gorgeous and uttered in glittering words. They raise the spirits, but it is safer to found actions upon what is more precise.

NARATHIHAPATE (*sullenly*) You shall not spoil my night of victory. I know that what Theinmazi said is true. I myself foresaw it. When I beheld Tepathin rising from the moat, when I watched him striding so resolutely in the van, I knew victory was certain, and had conceived in my own mind the very picture which Theinmazi has confirmed (to Yang) Go at once. Issue the proclamation. And see that the rest is exactly fulfilled.



(Before Yang can comply, Theinmazi rouses himself and stands up, his two women clinging to his robe and raising their faces to his in expectation. He moves his head from side to side as if listening, his ruby earrings swaying wildly. All watch him.)

THEINMAZI I hear footsteps.

NARATHIHAPATE (*startled by his tone*) Footsteps? What footsteps? I hear nothing at all.

THEINMAZI Nevertheless, footsteps are approaching.

NARATHIHAPATE (*in a glad high voice*) Ah! It is the messenger at last with the despatches! (*with some irony*) Well, Saw, you have had your way, I have waited. Now we shall get what you hold so necessary, word direct from my generals in the field.



THEINMAZI The steps that I hear are not mortal steps. (*He moves about, listening intently. His features become drawn, as do those of his women. The King trembles and rises from his place. Queen Saw and Yang watch with growing disquiet.*)

They are soft footfalls, as of one who has travelled far. As of one who is fatigued, who is grievously hurt.



(The sunset has faded and the room has grown dark)

NARATHIHAPATE (hysterically). Lights! Lights!

(But no one obeys, no one moves, for now they hear footsteps ascending the stairs Theinmazi cowers down The King's eyes are fixed on the head of the stairs Queen Saw and Yang stand together. The Amazon Guards have drawn their swords. The musicians are lying abjectly on the floor The steps continue to mount the stairs)



THEINMAZI What is very evil is coming up

NARATHIHAPATE (going towards the Queen) Save me! Save me!

(He screams. As his scream dies away, there appears on the verandah the Royal Chaplain. At the sight of him there is a universal cry of relief)

ALL Ah! Ah! Ah!

(The Chaplain advances into the chamber His face, with its shaven head, is very pale, his expression mournful, his eyes haggard Yet, to those present he seems a delectable sight, even Yang and the Queen having expected they knew not what Theinmazi, however, remains cowering to one side)

NARATHIHAPATE Oh, Master, how good to see you! (he kneels to him) But what has brought you at this hour?

CHAPLAIN (standing) I have come with news

NARATHIHAPATE (with a straining look of hope) Good news?

CHAPLAIN (with sadness) It cannot be good

(The Queen and Yang exchange agitated glances On Narathihapate the negative has a crushing effect)

NARATHIHAPATE (*moaning*) Your news is bad! It is of the army?

CHAPLAIN Someone came to me from the army

NARATHIHAPATE. A messenger?

CHAPLAIN. Tepathin

NARATHIHAPATE (*crying out*) Tepathin has come back! (*He shakes pitifully*)

CHAPLAIN I was in my cell, seated on my mat In the monastery hall the monks were chanting, their voices muted by the distance Scents of the dusk were stealing in. Sunk in reverie I was half rapt away, when, suddenly, the room was shaking, shuddering as a man shudders At the window a face was staring, an anguished face spattered with blood 'What man are you?' I cried He answered 'Tepathin of the Gate I come from the battle' (*The Chaplain pauses as if the recital were distasteful to him*)

NARATHIHAPATE (*most urgently*) What further did he say? You pressed him for news?

CHAPLAIN No I desired him to go at once Never have I had commerce with spirits.

NARATHIHAPATE Ah! You asked him nothing! When the kingdom's fate is in the balance, you ask nothing! Not even of the Guardian Spirit?

CHAPLAIN Of no spirit I told him to be gone But he cried 'I will not go until you take me to the King, for I have a message to deliver to him' 'Go yourself to the King,' said I 'I cannot find him,' he uttered 'I looked for him on Tharaba, but he was not there I searched the hundred rooms of his palace and found him not Now I am most weary, and tortured by my wounds' I told him you were in the watch-tower But he begged me 'Take me to him, for I have no strength to go alone' So from pity I set out and he, though I no longer saw him, followed for I heard his footfalls behind

NARATHIHAPATE (*looking wildly about*) Where is he now?



CHAPLAIN. He is here. Ask and he will deliver his message.

NARATHIHAPATE (*It is a light and a great voice.*) Tepathin! Tepathin! What news from the battle?

(*It is a moment that great sea a glow in a shade of, corner like a the hangings. The glow becomes a light and in it then, dimly, seen, is the shape of a man. He is shot there (it and there (it with an arrow. From it comes a wailing woe.)*)

VOICE. The army is perished! The army is perished!

(*At this frightful intelligence the King jumps and with a quivering shriek the wailing, and his words rise from the room.*)

End of Act III, Scene I

Act III Scene II

Early next day. The room of the Palace in which this final scene takes place is the same as that in which King Narathihapate sent Queen Sawlon to her death. It is still large with the painted narratives of the Buddha's life, and its sparse furniture of couch-dais, cushions and carpets is unchanged, though there are signs of disorder, some of the carpets being awry, others rolled up, while a number of articles are strewn about, such as gowns, robes, gold vessels, gilt umbrellas, jewelled slippers, banners, insignia and a state sword. Servants are packing boxes to one side. The three great doorways are open and through them comes the light of dawn. The King hurries into the room, his robe crumpled, a length of coloured silk wound carelessly on his head, without his slippers and his earrings. His agitation appears extreme.

NARATHIHAPATE (*shouting at servants*) Why are you so slow with the packing? You have done nothing since I came in last.

A SERVANT (*pointing to some boxes*) Those are packed, Sir.

NARATHIHAPATE What have you put in them?

SERVANT The principal regalia, Sir.

NARATHIHAPATE Have them taken down to the wharf at once (*Porters go to remove them and because they are not quick enough, the King strikes one with a stick*) Where is Yang?

SECOND SERVANT Still at the wharf, Sir, superintending the loading

NARATHIHAPATE Send for him No Let him stay there . How much has he loaded ?

SECOND SERVANT We cannot tell, Sir

NARATHIHAPATE. No one knows anything! Dawn is up and we are not yet away Go on! Hurry!

SERVANTS Yes, Sir

NARATHIHAPATE Hurry, I say! The Tartars must find nothing, not even a grain of rice. (*pointing to the articles on the floor*) Get these things into the boxes Where is my green plate ?

FIRST SERVANT. That went with the regalia, Sir
(*Enter in haste a superintendent He kneels*)

NARATHIHAPATE (*anxiously*) Has anything happened ? The Tartars ?

SUPERINTENDENT The Captain of the boats says there will not be room on board for the royal slave women

NARATHIHAPATE What does he mean ? There are scores of boats

SUPERINTENDENT The people are fleeing the city, Sir, and boats were taken by some of them

NARATHIHAPATE. How did they dare to take the royal boats ?

SUPERINTENDENT It was Theinnmazi, Sir He came down to the river bank with his company and his women and an immense train of porters. He called for forty boats His baggage was enormous He had even his hens with him

NARATHIHAPATE (*in an outraged voice*) His hens, you say ? He took his hens!

SUPERINTENDENT Yes, Sir Two of the boats were full of them

NARATHIHAPATE (*savagely*) I should have put him to death last night! Forty boatloads of luggage! How did he get so much property ?

SUPERINTENDENT I cannot say, Sir

NARATHIHAPATE Why did the Captain not stop him ?

SUPERINTENDENT He was afraid to, Sir And now he has not enough boats for the slaves

NARATHIHAPATE Then he must build rafts The women can be floated downstream Does he think I shall make a present of them to the Tartars?

SUPERINTENDENT Oh, no, Sir! But it will take till tomorrow to make rafts, as there is no wood ready.

NARATHIHAPATE Tomorrow! Why, we must leave now, within the hour!

SUPERINTENDENT The Captain knows that, Sir, and sent me for that reason to beg for orders The women are on the bank with their packages What is he to do with them?

NARATHIHAPATE (*with dark ferocity*) Drown them! If he cannot take them aboard, then let him drown them Throw them into the river The Tartars shall not have them Be off and tell him so! (*The Superintendent departs, running Queen Saw enters, dressed as she was in the last scene. She appears very tired The King goes to meet her*) Where have you been? Why have you left me alone so long?

SAW I have had so much to do There is such confusion. All want to be gone at once.

NARATHIHAPATE (*his voice rising*) Did you hear? Theinmazi has already fled He has deserted me And he took his hens with him!

SAW (*calmly*) No harm in that, so that he took himself off.

NARATHIHAPATE But there was harm He seized forty of the court boats, and now there is no room for the royal slave women I have had to order them to be drowned

SAW (*appalled*) You have ordered them to be drowned! Why, what have they done?

NARATHIHAPATE Done! They have done nothing It was Theinmazi

SAW Why then do you take their lives away, faithful servants of so many years?

NARATHIHAPATE Because I do not choose to leave them for the Tartars

SAW (*with deep indignation*) You would end your reign with such a cruel deed?

NARATHIHAPATE But my reign is not ending I have sent a messenger to Ophla with a rich present and a splendid title He will come to my aid

SAW It is now too late to seek to win him

NARATHIHAPATE Why? You yourself suggested it only yesterday

SAW When I spoke we had not lost the army What will he care for your present and title? He is master of the lower kingdom His is now the greater power

NARATHIHAPATE When we arrive with the Court and the treasure, his people will come over to us Moreover, as soon as he sees you, who were his father's friend, all will be well.

SAW (*firmly*). But I am not going with you

NARATHIHAPATE (*crushed*) You are deserting me as Theinmazi has deserted me! Why? Oh! Tell me why!

SAW. Because you are having the slave women drowned That is more than I can bear

NARATHIHAPATE They shall not be drowned! (*shouting wildly to an attendant*) Run! Run and catch the messenger from the Captain! Say the slave women are not to be touched (*the man runs to obey*) The Tartars shall have them What does it matter?

SAW. No need of that They can take refuge in a nunnery

NARATHIHAPATE (*humbly*) I never thought of it and, because you were not here, was carried into an extreme But since I have put right the error, you will go with me, will you not?

SAW (*nodding her head wearily*) I will go with you

(*There enters the Royal Chaplain with a novice Though he is worn and much fatigued, a glow of strength and calm emanates from his old face*)

CHAPLAIN I have come to say farewell

NARATHIHAPATE (*in a wailing voice*) They are dropping away
from me, all dropping away!

SAW. Will Your Reverence not continue in office as Royal
Chaplain and accompany the Court on its transfer to the
southern regions?

CHAPLAIN. I should not have accepted that office when the
King's father offered it to me And now I resign it



SAW. You resign when the King has most need of your counsel?

CHAPLAIN The King has never taken my counsel.

NARATHIHAPATE I will take it now, now! Give me your
counsel

CHAPLAIN. It is not because you have neglected my counsel
that I resign, nor will I stay because you take it

SAW Will Your Reverence be pleased to explain

CHAPLAIN (*with a lofty seriousness*). I resign because I can no longer bear to be entangled in the affairs of the world I entered the Order to find the truth and reach a consciousness of it in meditation But later my duties as Chaplain distracted me I was pressed to do this and that and gradually became enmeshed in policy, till I found myself party to a dark catastrophe The sound of arrows, an army fractured, a King in flight, a city falling! And last night you beheld me brought so low that I paraded the streets with a phantom of magic I must recapture my inner quiet or I shall have entered the Order in vain

SAW (*resignedly*) Let it be as you wish Though only a lay-woman, I understand I myself look back longingly upon a time of sweet quiet before I came into this phantasmagoria

CHAPLAIN (*gently*) So I will take my leave.

NARATHIHAPATE (*pleading*) Before you go, have you no word of consolation for me?

CHAPLAIN (*in a tone of compassion*) I cannot console you All suffering creatures who wander in the Three Worlds must needs endure the Eight World-Predicaments Not even that old Lord of the Three Worlds, King Mandhata, sovereign ruler of the four great islands and the two thousand lesser isles surrounding them and the two limbos of the world of spirits, was free from rise and fall, separations and the breach of death

NARATHIHAPATE (*starting*) Death! Do you foresee my death?

CHAPLAIN (*stiffly*) I said nothing of your death

NARATHIHAPATE (*in a screaming voice*) Nevertheless, you must know its time, for you drew my horoscope when I was your pupil

CHAPLAIN. If I know its time, speak of it I will not, no, not though it were today, at this very hour (*Saying this with an emphasis that shows him to be profoundly disturbed, he raises his hand in the gesture abating fear and then with downcast eyes slowly leaves the*

room The King watches him go, terror in his face During this colloquy with the Chaplain, the servants have continued to pack unobtrusively and now are fastening the boxes A messenger enters)

MESSENGER Lord, the Captain of the Boats has sent me

NARATHIHAPATE (*muttering*) Are they loaded, the boats?

MESSENGER Yes, Lord. All is ready. The royal barge, Thonlupasaw, rides at the jetty Provisions are aboard The oarsmen are in place The Captain awaits only the royal embarkation.

NARATHIHAPATE (*with excitement*) Good, good news! Hasten, hasten back! Say we start immediately (*between his teeth*) Death shall not have me! (*The man quickly leaves the room The King turns to the servants*) Is all packed?

A SERVANT. Yes, Lord (*He points to the boxes, which porters are already lifting on yokes*)

NARATHIHAPATE (*to Saw*) Let us set out

(*There enters Ophla, unattended He wears a golden casque in the form of a duck, a coat falling to his knees, and jewelled slippers. At the sight of him Queen Saw starts, but Narathihapate welcomes him effusively*)

NARATHIHAPATE Ah! Ophla, I knew you would come When you got my message you came flying (*turning to Queen Saw with a triumphant smile*) You see! I was right (*Ophla remains silent and impenetrable*)

SAW (*aside to Narathihapate*). Be careful He has a strange air Nor could he have got your letter in the time

NARATHIHAPATE (*to Ophla*) I sent you a letter to the South last night

OPHLA (*coldly*) Last night I was not in the South but here

NARATHIHAPATE Then I must thank you the more Without prompting you came at the bruit of my danger

OPHLA (*in a hard tone*) You need not thank me

NARATHIHAPATE But I do It was noble to forget the past and offer your services Have you brought some men?

OPHLA (*laconically*) I have brought men

NARATHIHAPATE That is most fortunate, since I have no one

left but my Amazons, and for the passage down river they are not enough.

OPHLA. My men will see to all.



NARATHIHAPATE The Queen and I are about to embark
Come with us, for delay is dangerous.

OPHLA There is no need to embark.

NARATHIHAPATE What! Have you brought so many men
that we can stand here against the Tartars?

OPHLA. That was not my meaning

NARATHIHAPATE But how otherwise can we avoid embarking?

OPHLA (*with a trace of insolence*). I have made other arrangements
(*There is a pause The King looks at him with apprehension*)

NARATHIHAPATE. But I must go aboard! (*with a gesture as if warding off danger*) I will go aboard!

OPHLA (*at last disclosing himself*) You shall not!

NARATHIHAPATE (*fear seizing him*). Not go? I do not understand. Why should you stop me? You cannot stop me!

OPHLA I can stop you My men have disarmed your Amazons and surround the Palace

NARATHIHAPATE (*trembling*). What do you want?

SAW (*sternly*). You know that this is treason?

OPHLA No. It is the will of the people But there is no disrespect to you, gracious Queen What we have is against the King only

NARATHIHAPATE I have done nothing.

OPHLA (*with sarcasm*) What you have done by undoing is more than most by doing can do

NARATHIHAPATE (*at random*) Fortune was against me, that is all.

OPHLA. It was not misfortune that caused you to exile my father, but arrogance You thought you could rule without him. But alone, your first act was to insult and threaten the Tartar envoys and bring upon your country defeat and invasion

NARATHIHAPATE (*to Saw*) Cannot you stop him abusing me like this?

SAW (*to Ophla*) It ill becomes you, as the son of your father, who was a great nobleman, to vilify a King in the moment of his disaster.

OPHLA. I speak as the people's voice. The Headmen of towns and villages, the landowners, the merchants, have authorised me so to speak For long they have watched the King's mad career and seen ruin mounting up There is an old saying in

the South 'Bore not thy country's belly, abase not thy country's forehead; fell not thy country's banner, break not



thy country's tusk, sully not thy country's face, cut not thy country's feet and hands ' But you, King, have done all these evil things

NARATHIHAPATE (*wildly*) I do not know what you mean

OPHLA (*with increasing severity*) I will tell you 'Bore not thy country's belly' To let your favourites, such as Theinmazi, batten on the land, that is to bore your country's belly

NARATHIHAPATE I never knew till today that he had enriched himself so much

OPHLA You did not care whether he did or not Listen again 'Abase not thy country's forehead' That is, spurn not good council You spurned my father's, you have spurned Queen Saw's, you have spurned the Chaplain's

NARATHIHAPATE (*to Saw*) That is not true Say it is not true Have I not always been guided by your advice?

(*Queen Saw cannot answer*)

OPHLA The great Queen is silent Even her warm and loyal

heart cannot suggest words to defend you But I have not finished the indictment. 'Fell not thy country's banner' The country's banner is the Buddhist Order. But you listened to vile doctrines, and ran mad with Theinmazi, preferring witchcraft to the sweet teaching of the monks. (*Narathihapate seeks to interpose but Ophla bears him down*) You shall not interrupt You asked me to explain and shall hear me out. 'Break not thy country's tusk' The royal family is the country's tusk, but what did you do to Sawlon, your Queen?

NARATHIHAPATE (*with staring eyes*) Do not speak her name! Never call her! (*gasping*) The poison plate changed colour! What else could I do?



OPHLA (*ominously*) Had you the plate now, it might prophesy again (*With a sudden gesture he stamps violently upon the ground and there enters at once a tall very black man, bare to the waist, wearing a red skirt, and holding raised up in his two hands a golden cup*)

NARATHIHAPATE Ah! (*He falls on his knees*)

SAW (*with horror*). What is this? Surely you do not intend bodily harm to the King?

OPHLA (*with a glare*). The people have pronounced upon him sentence of death

SAW. Ah! No! that cannot be!

OPHLA. It is so. On the four counts I have detailed, and on the two further counts, sullying the country's face cutting its hands and feet, that is, exposing it to disgrace and invasion, they have found him guilty.

NARATHIHAPATE (*mumbling*) Have mercy, have mercy!

SAW I know the people My father is a village councillor. Often as a child I saw the Council sit in judgement It always mixed justice with mercy Let the King now enter a monastery That will suffice to satisfy the people

OPHLA. It is not possible If it were, I would assent because I desire to please Your Majesty in everything But a deposed King is only quiet in the grave

NARATHIHAPATE (*pleading*) I would practise austerities, follow the rule and beg my food, nor speak a word outside the precincts

OPHLA (*with finality*) Enough (*pointing to his executioner*) He will give you the cup

NARATHIHAPATE (*clinging to Saw*) You will not let them do this to me! Offer him money, all my jewels, anything he may demand!

OPHLA I already have all you possess. You must drink the cup

NARATHIHAPATE (*screaming as the executioner approaches*) I will not drink! Nor can any man be forced to swallow

OPHLA. If you do not drink, my men will enter and cut you down

NARATHIHAPATE I will not drink! I will not drink!

SAW (*to Ophla*) Since it has come to this leave us awhile. Stand outside the door Watch if you will But let me and the King speak alone together.

OPHLA (*bowing*) As you wish, great Lady. (*He leaves the apartment with his executioner, after placing the cup of poison on a red laequer stand near the couch-dais Up till this, the King and Queen Saw have not been seated, but now they go to the couch-dais and sit upon it. The King turns haunted eyes to the Queen*)

NARATHIHAPATE Twice have you saved me Save me again

SAW (*gently*) Would that I could! But how can I do it? Ophla has prepared his plot with care Last night in the confusion he must have slipped into the city We are wholly in his power

NARATHIHAPATE (*too distracted to listen*) I implore you to save me!

SAW I cannot save you, but I can help you to face death How strong was Sawlon at her last hour! She was stronger than you, her executioner So may you now, if you go with dignity, snatch from Ophla a part of his triumph

NARATHIHAPATE Alas! I have not Sawlon's strength What a strange woman she was, hard and glittering, unbreakable, sufficient! I flung myself against her rock and was shattered What was her secret? That no power of earth could intrude upon her And she had the bravery to maintain that stance But I was born without such sufficiency and cannot find it now at my end. (*he is as if terrified by the word*) My end! Is there no hope? Ah, how great my hopes! Lordship of the world, of all the worlds! And now! (*he pauses*) In truth, there was no hope after my ruin was declared on the sacred mountain that day I met you first Yet, I hoped and, carried beyond hope, dreamed Was I not right to dream? Instead, was only a despair I could not face

SAW Nevertheless, now you must face your fate, as must we all at last, or die miserably

NARATHIHAPATE (*sighing*) If I could dream again and in a vision fight down my fear, I'd win in spite of all Thus Sawlon conquered, sustained by an invincible self-image (*his glance falls on the cup*) What poison has he put in? Some of

them strike through you like a flame Others are more slow
 It is strange, one cannot imagine what poison is like to take
 Do you think it will hurt me much? I was foolish not to have
 ready my own instant poison The Kings of India carry a
 hollow pin One prick of it, I have heard, renders them in-
 sensible Had I such a pin now, it would be easy But to
 drink this cup—no, I could not swallow, my throat is too
 parched! If I must die, is it not better to let them cut me
 down?

SAW That were more terrible Think well

NARATHIHAPATE Give me the cup *(She places it in his hands*



He stares at it But as he stares, his expression changes, its utter misery giving place to a dard excitement He looks into the cup as into a magic mirror and speaks with mounting intensity.) To think that death lurks in this pool Among the Himalaya, it is said, are bottomless pits where reside dragons that are great sorcerers Those who look into their abysses see rise blue shapes and are carried up by their rush into the whiteness Yet these

shapes of the grand sorcerers cannot be as puissant as the monster in this cup, for death has never been put to death, but the grand sorcerers have their term Those who aspired to the Lordship of the Three Worlds had but one aim only, to spill death's soul, but since death is still in his place, and moves everywhere as of old, being couched now within this golden circle, the Lords will no more than have lulled him awhile When I took their style, it was to fight with death To destroy him, I took it Now is the hour of that battle and I will call him from his hiding place *(As the King proceeds in this harangue he becomes more and more exalted and tranced He rises from the dais and, holding the cup in both hands, begins to perambulate*

the room. The Queen stands watching him and with tense face awaits the event.) Come out, death, come out of your pool! (he halts and raises the cup to his lips) Shall I have to suck you out? Or will you rise up in the fume of your venom? (he lowers the cup) Come out! Let me see the visage that desolates the Three Worlds! Rear up! Rise up! Spread the cloak made of the pelt of a white elephant (screaming) He is afraid! He dare not show himself (with a demented gesture he flings the cup to the floor and stares at the spilled liquid) Where are you, death? (as he stares, a convulsion passes over him) Oh! most horrible! (he shrinks, as if he saw growing a shape, his eyes following it as it rises higher until he is looking upward) Death! Death! (he covers his eyes and begins to run) Oh! Oh! (he catches hold of the painted hangings as if to hide himself) Do not strike! (He shrieks inhumanly, a violent spasm shakes him, and he sinks, clutching a hanging which falls and envelops him)

SAW (approaching and lifting a corner of the hanging) Dead! (She drops the hanging Ophla comes in quickly)

OPHLA (his voice trembling) He died ensorcelled

SAW Better so (She is much distraught)

OPHLA He was a madman What joy that he is gone! But think of him no longer There is much for us to do

SAW (stiffly) Us? I do not understand

OPHLA Why, you and I Who else?

SAW (with irony). All is settled, I see

OPHLA (unaware of her mood) Yes, a Regency will be established forthwith, with Your Majesty, of course, as Senior Regent I will be one of the junior members No need for the moment to appoint an heir What is instantly required is to negotiate with the Tartars It is not too late to pull something from the ruin

SAW (very cool,) Your plan is well conceived except for one item

OPHLA Which item great Lady?

SAW I will have nothing to do with your Regency

OPHLA (*much dashed*) I entreat Your Majesty Without Your Majesty's countenance no Regency can stand.

SAW (*with indifference*) It is your plan. See it through yourself.

OPHLA Your Majesty is not treating me with due consideration. At the kingdom's desperate hour I come to save it, but find that you refuse to help me.

SAW (*turning on him with warm indignation*) You are talking nonsense How can I, the Chief Queen, with any semblance of propriety, join the man who set poison before the King? The motives you claim to have acted on sound very fine, but you have omitted the chief one—plain revenge I am in no mood to parley further My plans are laid and I will carry them out.

OPHLA (*stunned and much alarmed*) Plans? A rival Regency?
(*Yang enters in haste*)

YANG. I have been waiting on the bank most anxiously. What has detained Your Majesties?

SAW A most eminent person! (*abruptly to Ophla*) The Comptroller of the Household and I have business to discuss You will retire

OPHLA (*pleading*). Will Your Majesty not deign to take me into your confidence?

SAW. No! (*Her stare is so intimidating that he withdraws in confusion. When he is gone, she turns with a soft look to Yang, who has been standing in bewilderment*) Only yesterday you said 'let us go' and I said 'not yet' Now the time has come round and I say 'let us go'.

YANG (*confused*). To the river? But where is the King?

SAW (*smiling*) No, no, not to the river That is not necessary for the King is gone

YANG. Not to the river? The King gone?

SAW (*going to the fallen hanging and raising a corner*) Look.

YANG The King the King . dead!

SAW. But ask me not how he came to his end, for we must act quickly.

YANG (*still confused*) What must we do?

SAW (*smiling again*). I have said. Let us go.

YANG (*in a voice quivering with joy*). You mean . . . to . . . the village?

SAW. Of course My task is over Why should I linger? My father is waiting for me at Falling Flowers. This life which was like an hallucination is ended So, what do you say? Shall we go?

YANG (*kneeling with deep emotion*) Oh, incomparable, most rare adored great Lady!

The End

